

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

Representations of Love in the Novels of Jeanette Winterson From 1985
to 2000

being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the University of Hull

by

Julie Lisa Ellam B.A.(Hons), M.A.

April 2003

Acknowledgements

The support and guidance of my supervisor, Dr Jane Thomas, has enabled me to complete this work. I am also indebted to her for advising me to apply for the Graduate Teaching Assistant position at Hull University and for all of the technical advice she has offered consistently whilst I was working on both my thesis and M.A. dissertation. I would also like to acknowledge and thank Professor Angela Leighton for her detailed analysis of a draft of this work.

Thanks must go to my family, friends and colleagues who have had to endure a constant barrage of complaints and tears over the last few years. Without their kindness and love it is unlikely that I would have even embarked on such a project, let alone complete it. Finally, this is for all the absent loved ones who are always in my thoughts.

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Abbreviations

O *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985)

P *The Passion* (1987)

S *Sexing the Cherry* (1989)

W *Written on the Body* (1992)

AL *Art and Lies* (1994)

GS *Gut Symmetries* (1997)

TP *The Powerbook* (2000)

AO *Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery* (1995)

Introduction

What a strange world it is where you can have as much sex as you like but love is taboo. I'm talking about the real thing, the grand passion, which may not allow affection or convenience or happiness. The truth is that love smashes into your life like an ice floe, and even if your heart is built like the Titanic you go down. (TP 51)¹

This reference from Jeanette Winterson's *The Powerbook* typifies the value that love is given in her seven main novels. Love is idealised. It is also depicted as unavoidable, as unavoidable as the ice floe and as potentially destructive. Idealised, inevitable love is the thread that connects Winterson's writing together.

Winterson's representations of love and the paradox at the heart of these representations are the primary concerns of this thesis. On the one hand love provides the opportunity for searching for freedom and for crossing barriers of sexuality in her work. This freedom is sought through the questioning of the dominance of heterosexuality in Western discourses of love. Winterson's writing takes pleasure in the concept of the forbidden fruit and challenges the discourses that have legitimised heterosexuality and unhappy marriages. It is understood in her work that normative practices have traditionally been a weapon to marginalise. On the other hand, she posits that love and the effect of loving are transcendent. Love surpasses the everyday. It is special. By suggesting the possibility of transcendence Winterson is enabling the maintenance of hierarchical thinking. Winterson's paradoxical position surfaces when love is heightened as a transcendent emotion. This is a political,

¹ The referencing for Jeanette Winterson's texts is abbreviated according to page iii of this thesis.

material paradox because by allowing for hierarchical thinking her work ultimately maintains rather than deconstructs binary oppositions, whilst simultaneously urging that love should be available to all regardless of sex or sexuality.

Whilst arguing that Winterson's version of love is idealised, as I believe the earlier reference to 'the real thing, the grand passion' in *The Powerbook* exemplifies, it is vital that the background for this type of love is specified in order to proceed. Irving Singer's *The Nature of Love* explores the historicity of the idealisation of love, and is useful for demarcating the tradition that Winterson is writing within. Singer points out that: "Plato initiates the great idealistic tradition which continued not only in the Christian attitude toward love but also in courtly and ultimately Romantic ideas about spiritual unity that provides a goodness sex alone could not equal" (*Nature* 27).

For the sake of clarity the original difference between Platonic and Christian love needs to be explained. Augustine influentially synthesised the two terms, but the history of idealised love has not always been founded on this blending of concepts. Philip S. Watson writes the Translator's Preface to Anders Nygren's *Agape and Eros* and differentiates Agape (Christian love), from Eros (Platonic love) thus: "This love is not, like Eros, a longing and striving after something man lacks and needs, but a response of gratitude for something freely and bountifully given, namely God's own Agape;..." (ix). It is necessary to distinguish the historical difference between Agape and Eros at this early stage because Winterson intermittently places significance on the search for love. Eros, as defined by Socrates in Plato's *Symposium*, is inimical to ascending the ladder to Absolute Good, Absolute Beauty. Eros is concerned with the search for, and with the movement upwards towards, a greater good and this is a theme that persistently recurs in Winterson's representations of love.

Winterson's brand of love readily embraces the origins of both traditions. She also develops the connection between sexual, romantic and courtly love. Love is not separated from sex in her writing and as my quotation from *The Powerbook* suggests, sexual love is a component of her transcendent love. The concept of Agape infiltrates her work, in that there is an expectation that love should cross boundaries and be limitless. The freedom to love is ever present and is re-stylised by Winterson in her refusal of the constructed boundaries between heterosexuality and homosexuality.

The idealisation of love in Winterson's writing does not, however, allow for closure for her lovers. In an interview for *The Paris Review* in 1997 (entitled 'The Art of Fiction') Winterson discusses with Audrey Bilger how concerned her work is with disappointed lovers. Bilger draws her on this lack of closure: "All of your works involve a love plot. And yet things don't usually work out for your characters; you seldom allow them to have a kind of perfect bliss in love" (99).² Winterson's reply, "well, I don't do happy endings, do I?" (99), underlines how for her the crucial aspect of writing is not to look for simplistic answers. Her characters often search for love in the desire for unity, but are rarely unified with the beloved. The idealisation comes in the act of searching and the desire for unity, rather than a conclusively 'happy ending'. Winterson refuses a superficial neutralisation of paradox, and this is made clear in the following reference:

We live in a society that peddles solutions, whether it's solutions to those extra pounds you're carrying, or to your thinning hair, or to your loss of appetite, loss of love. We are always looking for solutions, but actually what we are engaged in is a process throughout life during which you never get it right. ('The Art' 99)

² Interviews with Winterson are referenced in this bibliography under Winterson's name.

In so far as Winterson refuses her characters closure in their relationships, she does not simplify her writing or the effects of romantic love. Despite this wish to refuse simplification and easy solutions there are, nevertheless, themes in her work that become predictable as one reads each of her novels. This predictable quality is most evident in the way that love is so frequently depicted as a solution, in that her characters desire unification with their lovers, even though their love is often represented as enslaving and as the cause of disappointments. When the narrator of *Written on the Body* looks back at his/her relationship with Louise, for example, and compares the gains to the losses, s/he argues how their love outweighs the pain: “And if anyone had said this was the price I would have agreed to pay it. That surprises me; that with the hurt and the mess comes a shaft of recognition. It was worth it. Love is worth it” (*W* 156). This decision in favour of love is the one that arises in Winterson’s novels time and again. This thesis highlights how Winterson always finally accepts love, in all its different forms, as a means for living one’s life, and this is why I argue that transcendent love is not only described but prescribed by her. Her affiliation to love is always influenced by Christian ideals, where there is a synthesis between Agape and Eros. This affiliation becomes predictable, which is both a strength and weakness in her work. On the whole I consider this to be a strength. Each one of her novels stands distinctly apart from the others but they are simultaneously connected as the theme of idealised love threads them together. Winterson relies on this thread to create her own particularised oeuvre, where love disturbs boundaries yet theoretically allows for them when condoning the notion of transcendence.

The Christian ethos that infiltrates Winterson’s love is also noticeable in Denis de Rougemont’s thorough examination of Western representations of love in *Love in the Western World*. When de Rougemont seeks to defend *Love in the Western World* from

critics who accuse him of favouring Agape over Eros, his preference for ‘essential Love’ displays a faith in this emotion as having religious value:

Any attempt to eliminate either of the two poles of these tensions, to confound it with its opposite, to reduce it to the law of the Other (whether it be stronger or weaker) through annexation or colonization, or to establish between them any relation of subordination, brings about a totalitarian state and destroys the interests of life. As to the subject of our concern: it is to destroy the existence of essential Love. (379)

This last sentence privileges the existence of love and contradicts the earlier call for tension. This contradiction is also inherent in Winterson’s kind of loving, especially in *The Powerbook*. Beneath (or rather, above) the desire of not wanting to privilege opposites, love is still held up as ultimately honourable and always worth searching for by Winterson and de Rougemont. Both of these writers want to preserve love and to keep it separate from conflict. The prescription that they offer is that love should be understood as being beyond the tension of opposites; it is, or should be, transcendent.

In *Death, Desire and Loss* Jonathan Dollimore examines *Love in the Western World* and remarks on passion’s connection with religion: “For de Rougemont, passionate love in the Western tradition is a perversion and/or displacement of religion, even a hubristic surrogate religion seeking spiritual transcendence where it cannot be found, namely in human sexual desire” (64). I agree that de Rougemont describes passion in such terms, and believe that Winterson’s evaluation of passion and love generally corresponds with this also.

Passion, courtly love and romantic love are problematic terms, particularly because there is a necessary overlap. Anthony Giddens’ definition of romantic love in *The Transformations of Intimacy* is particularly useful for explaining the separate qualities

of this term: “Romantic love presumes that a durable emotional tie can be established with the other on the basis of qualities intrinsic to that tie itself. It is the harbinger of the pure relationship although it also stands in tension with it” (2). The pure relationship is the ideal of a self merging with another self. The tension and the love story come about through the impossibility of this happening. When Winterson states that she does not ‘do’ happy endings, this is the reason why. Dramatic tension is implicit in romantic love and inherent in this tension is the understanding that the tie between two people (which makes the love story possible) is a fiction. The love story arises out of this tension.

The methodology for this thesis relies mostly on poststructuralist theory. Roland Barthes, Catherine Belsey, Jacques Derrida and Stevi Jackson are just some of the writers who are invoked at various times in order to establish this poststructuralist framework. Because of this methodological background, I understand love in all its forms to be a construct, a learned emotion. With this theory there is also the implication that the ideal of one individual merging with another is not possible and ‘true’ love is therefore an impossible dream. Poststructuralist theory maintains that the individual has no essential self. The concept of provisional subject status, which Chris Weedon develops in *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, is one vehicle for explaining how one may fall in love with another. This provisional view of subject status helps to explain how lovers are able to create the fiction of falling in love. I interpret Winterson’s novels as being influenced by poststructuralist theories particularly in her regard for the relativity and arbitrariness of meaning and for the fiction of the essential self. She is a knowledgeable writer of the late twentieth/early twenty-first century and, as Belsey argues in *Poststructuralism*, Winterson has not

necessarily read “Saussure or the poststructuralists”, but her writing is influenced by these theories (71).

The main paradox in Winterson’s writing arises when she relinquishes a poststructuralist perspective in order to proclaim that love and art should be considered in hierarchical terms and, furthermore, they are at the summit of the hierarchy. This thesis is not necessarily setting out to solve this paradox but intends instead to highlight how, colloquially, Winterson wants to have her cake and eat it. When working within the logic of binary thought Winterson’s representations of love must conclusively be described as preferring transcendence over deconstruction. The difficulty with this ‘solution’ to the paradox is that there is an effacing of the times when love is liberating in Winterson’s work.

A psychoanalytic framework is utilised in this thesis to a lesser extent. There is a vital difference between psychoanalytic theory and poststructuralism, most of all in psychoanalytic theory’s dependency on the final, phallic signifier. This thesis is concerned with love and because of this it is felt that psychoanalysis offers useful insights into exploring patterns in relationships. Although poststructuralism and psychoanalysis have differing agendas and must ultimately clash in their views of the relativity of meaning, both offer penetrating insights into meaning, fictionality and the way we love.

Feminism is the third necessary framework for this work. For the purposes of outlining the basic working practice of this thesis these three theories have been separated into categories but in practice they overlap and cross-connect. The texts by Stevi Jackson and Catherine Belsey which I cite in this work may, for example, be described as poststructuralist and feminist, whilst being simultaneously aware of the implications of psychoanalytic theories.

Because of the theorised nature of this thesis Winterson's personal life and sexuality are not drawn upon to attempt to understand her writing. Her stance in *Art Objects* is, "I am a writer who happens to love women. I am not a lesbian who happens to write" (AO 104). For these reasons of wanting to concentrate on the text rather than assuming an author-centred approach, this thesis stands apart from many of the criticisms of Winterson's work. Her sexuality would be of major importance to a thesis concerned with lesbian women writers, but, as this is focused on Winterson's writing rather than her life, I do not draw on her biographical details to explain away her practice of often writing about love in a manner that challenges the hegemony of heterosexual romantic discourses.

Traditionally, romantic love has been a mode of control where women have been slighted. Admittedly it offers the possibility of becoming an active agent before the two selves merge and, using Giddens' argument once more, it allows for contact with the outside world as it is, "an active, and radical, engagement with the 'maleness' of modern society" (2). To love is to enter the Symbolic Order of culture but the tension that Giddens refers to when defining romantic love also arises from the impact that this engagement has had on women's lives. As he argues, romantic love has helped to keep women "'in their place' – the home", despite, or rather because of, the 'maleness of modern society' (2).

Historically, love in literature has been understood from a feminist position as detrimental to women's lives. The prospect of analysing Winterson's writings on love begs the question of how does her usage fit with previous feminist disputes over the role that love has played in women's compliance with patriarchal values. Winterson's continuous re-working of love in all its different categories, such as romantic, sexual and courtly, has the effect of revising love as a positive emotion across the spectrum

of sexuality and sexual difference. In this thesis I pursue Stevi Jackson's arguments in 'Even Sociologists Fall in Love' and 'Women and Heterosexual Love', where she hopes to recoup love from the outright negations of earlier feminisms. I believe Winterson may be understood as similarly reviving a positive perspective on love. Simone de Beauvoir, Germaine Greer and Shulamith Firestone are just three of the earlier feminist writers whom Jackson cites in 'Women and Heterosexual Love' as previously interrogating the material impact of love on women's lives. Jackson understands these writers as being "unambiguously critical of romantic love. It was the bait in the marriage trap" ('Women' 50). Jackson persuasively argues that love need not be interpreted with such defensiveness:

You do not have to see romance readers as cultural dupes in order to argue that romance is implicated in maintaining a cultural definition of love which is detrimental to women. Nor need we resort to a moralistic sackcloth-and-ashes feminism which enjoins strict avoidance of cultural products and practices which are less than ideologically sound. It is not necessary to deny the pleasures of romance or the euphoria of falling in love in order to be sceptical about romantic ideals and wary of their consequences. ('Women' 50)

Jackson's reasoning informs this thesis' interest in love, as she eloquently spells out the need to embrace the complexities of the discourse of love in the West to be able to discuss it. As Jackson explains, there has been a shift in feminist thinking since the publication of *The Female Eunuch* and *The Dialectic of Sex* and women's interest in romantic fiction consequently has been given more favourable treatment. An example of this may be found in Janice Radway's sympathetic text, *Reading the Romance*. It is

also not just academics and theorists who have been recuperating love as a valid topic for cultural analysis. Winterson's novels also revise and revive this interest.

Gillian Beer has recently criticised fiction in which women are at the mercy of love. Her paper for the 2002 Orange Prize for Fiction Lecture, 'Fever: New Freedoms for Women Writers', argues that there is restrictiveness when using love as the sole plot source.³ The age-old literary devices of female entrapment and masculine sexual desire disturb Beer, rather than love *per se*, but this is where Beer stereotypes representations of love as portrayed in literature. She presumes that love is depicted inconsequentially. Contrary to Beer's speech, this thesis cannot allow love to be simply understood as an emotion that is only subjugating to heterosexual women and a means of exercising power for heterosexual men. Winterson's novels never assume such a simplified view and further to this I believe Beer's perspective undermines the complexities of novels that rely on love thematically.

Love's associations with the domestic sphere as well as with emotions tend to make love a feminine therefore historically and materially less valid topic to write about. Alex Clark's criticism of Beer's lecture argues in defence of love and consequently supports women writers who continue to look at love in their work: "By celebrating women's apparently 'new-found' ability to look beyond their immediate lives and immediate concerns, Professor Beer unwittingly diminishes both the difficulty and value of writing well about love, desire or domesticity" (36). By slighting the importance of love in literature Beer is also disputing the validity of writing about emotions. The freedom to express feelings is retrievable through the justification of the feminine. By disregarding love, Beer is condoning the binary

³ Beer's speech is available on the Orange Prize website and there are therefore no page numbers to cite. The specific URL is: <http://195.157.68.238/news/beer.html> and is recorded in the bibliography under Beer's name.

opposition that supports the differentiation between masculinity and femininity, where masculinity and rationality become superior in the hierarchy. Beer is forgetting that emotions are of political interest, and the reading and writing about them is not, and should not be, the preserve of a masculine biased canon.

Winterson's interest in love is, however, apolitical in the sense in that she desires love to be transcendent. It becomes materialist, though, when recognising how the claim to love another can be used as a form of emotional blackmail. Her writing is aware of how saying 'I love you' has power inscribed in the promise it holds out. Winterson subsequently balances her idealisation of love somewhat in that love and saying 'I love you' can become a form of control. *Art and Lies* memorably correlates the ethical claim to love somebody with sexual and mental abuse. The twelve dancing princesses in *Sexing the Cherry* fantastically undermine the institution of marriage in their tales of dangerous heterosexual liaisons. Adultery is often Winterson's response to compulsory heterosexuality and this is analysed specifically in relation to *Gut Symmetries*. Love is represented as continually transcending the naturalisation of heterosexuality in her work and this effectively reveals the hypocrisy of institutionalised love (in the shape of marriage and the nuclear family) from *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* onwards.⁴

Predominantly, Winterson relies on self-consciously demonstrating her awareness of how we are constructs, fictions if you will, and is a writer for her time. She is aware of postmodern techniques, as with the knowing implementation of intertextuality and its impact on creating the world around us. Winterson's stock-in-trade is to invite other literatures to tell her love stories and this device culminates in *The Powerbook's* particularly overt dependency on works by other writers as well as

⁴ This is referred to as *Oranges* from this point on.

her earlier texts. These intertextual threads, which Winterson pulls on in all of her novels, vindicate her own concern with love because they emphasise how she is part of a long tradition of writers who employ love as a major thematic concern.

Lynne Pearce, in ‘The Emotional Politics of Reading Winterson’, recognises Winterson’s interest in the theme of love and points out how both Winterson’s writing and her relationship with her critics invite unguarded reactions: “Jeanette Winterson is an emotional writer who has solicited a wide range of emotional responses from her readers. In her own opinion, emotion – even when it is painful and disturbing – is intrinsic to aesthetic experience” (29). Pearce’s use of the following quotation from *Art Objects*, which compares the effects of ‘true’ art to falling in love, supports this point: “A love parallel would be just; falling in love challenges the power to which we lay claim” (*AO* 15). *Art Objects* is likewise understood within this thesis as supporting Winterson’s treatise on transcendent love. Idealised love, like art in *Art Objects*, is desirable, valuable and its existence is beyond dispute for her. Bearing Pearce’s and Winterson’s words in mind, the following seven chapters look at Winterson’s seven main novels in chronological order. *Boating for Beginners* is referred to only in passing, much as Winterson separates this novel from her main works.

The chronological order of the novels is followed chapter by chapter. The first chapter focuses on *Oranges* and is dominated by the love between adoptive mother and daughter, love for God and love for Melanie. The thread that connects the parent to the child is analysed as a construction, and this consciousness of fictions is interpreted as being reinforced by the stories that the mother tells the daughter Jeanette. Jeanette’s love for God is esteemed, and He is described as her “emotional role model” (*O* 163). This love for God is described as transcendental and stands in

tension with Jeanette's relationship with Melanie, which demands the freedom to love across barriers of dominant heterosexual discourses. Love in *Oranges* is considered to be a fiction, and is a means to challenge dominant discourses. In its finest form it is conclusively a religion despite being understood as a construct rather than a biological fact. These dimensions to love frequently recur in Winterson's next six novels, as the message that is preached insists that love should ideally surpass boundaries and, when perfect, it is of the highest order.

The second chapter, which is concerned with *The Passion*, is necessarily an examination of Winterson's descriptions of passion. This is also where Winterson's use of romantic love and courtly love are discussed for the first time in detail. Ambiguous passion is the superficial ideal in this work, as it almost manages to escape limitations. The restrictions of loving are the main focus of this chapter and *The Passion* is conclusively interpreted as signposting these restrictions and partly embracing them. This is because the adherence to passion must always mean suffering, which is emblematised in the imprisonment of Henri.

The third chapter is based on *Sexing the Cherry*. The analysis firstly revolves around Jordan's search for his beloved Fortunata and the journey he takes in his imagination through the cities of the interior. This chapter is also the point where the connection between Winterson's and Virginia Woolf's work is first made explicit with a comparative reading of *Sexing the Cherry* and *Orlando*.

The loss of a loved one is understood as the central concern of *Written on the Body* and this dominates the reading offered in chapter four. This piece is divided into alternating subsections of uncertainty and certainty in order to reflect how this novel both holds on to and deconstructs the certainties of loving. Conclusively, and despite the uncertainty that comes about with deconstruction, it is felt that love alone is

allowed to remain constant in a changing world in this novel. Love is finally written of as defying deconstruction.

A reading of *Written on the Body* is continued in the next chapter in an analysis of Winterson's combined interest in love and language. *Art and Lies* is the main focus of chapter five, but I understand that these two novels are firmly connected in that their subtexts favour a poststructuralist awareness of language constructing our emotions and the world around us. This poststructuralist awareness is, however, limited in that love is still transcendent in *Art and Lies* as well as *Written on the Body*, and is once more represented as beyond the powers of deconstruction.

Chapter six examines Winterson's interest in the theme of adultery in association with *Gut Symmetries*. Infidelity appears in all of Winterson's novels, but it is not until *Gut Symmetries* that the pain and pleasure that are elemental to the disruption of married life are broached so evenly, or symmetrically. The search for love is still worth it in this novel too, but *Gut Symmetries* is understood as balancing the idealisation of the search motif with an awareness of the debilitating emptiness that drives one to fill an absence. Because this is an examination of adultery the erotic triangle is also necessarily discussed. This triangle that Winterson adopts so readily (and which is so often composed of one man and two women) is analysed with reference to works by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Terry Castle.

The final chapter centres on *The Powerbook* and this is where Winterson demonstrates her commitment to the idealisation of love most clearly. The urge for unification resurfaces intermittently in all of her novels but it is not until this latest work that the wish for synthesis and 'true' love takes such a strong position thematically. It is also in this novel that transcendent love becomes most apparent above the superficial construction of the tension of opposites. *The Powerbook* offers

itself, at times, as a fore-runner to *Oranges* because of the narrator's anger at being adopted and unloved and in its tendency to essentialise love in spite of poststructuralist theory. It is at the same time paradoxically the last word on love because of its extreme concentration on old and new love stories. Love and the past are inextricably linked, just as they are for Jeanette in *Oranges*. Once more, it is love and the action of story-telling that threads the work together.

Chapter One

The Ties That Bind

Oranges are not the Only Fruit

Three love objects dominate the structure of *Oranges*. The first love that the narrator Jeanette experiences is for her mother. Their connection is represented by a thread motif and this is understood as the primary tie that binds. This tie, or thread, is a constructed attachment. It symbolises a love that is constructed rather than one that is biologically essential. Jeanette's love for God is elemental to *Oranges* and this bond is her template for other relationships. With God there is no betrayal, which contrasts with the way Jeanette perceives she is later treated by her mother and Melanie. Melanie is Jeanette's third beloved and first sexual partner. *Oranges* suggests that all of these loves are natural (despite the thread of love being a construct) and consequently questions the accepted belief of what natural actually is. Jeanette is adopted and this is also written of as normal/natural in later Winterson novels, in that they also often centre on narrators who are adopted or fostered. The adopted or fostered child becomes the norm. The love for Melanie works to undermine the naturalisation of homophobia. Jeanette's love for Melanie is portrayed as innocent, and this castigates those who criticise their lesbian relationship as being the unnatural ones.

Jeanette is eventually betrayed by her mother and Melanie. Jeanette's disappointment with her mother and Melanie establishes how these two become the unnatural ones in not loving by the codes that Jeanette believes in. For Jeanette, love is conclusively dependent on the idea of its ability to transcend sexual barriers and

gender. It should be limitless. Jeanette's love for God is only spoken of briefly, but this section of the novel is pivotal for understanding how vital love is to *Oranges* and the narrator. This love, which is first negotiated in *Oranges*, is employed by Winterson repeatedly in her later novels. This form of love asks for the naturalisation of the non-biological and for the inclusion, rather than exclusion, of difference. It also idealises the unification of lovers and claims that love is transcendent.

Mother

The family and the lover are central to all of Winterson's work. Friendship exists in the camaraderie of army life in *The Passion* and unnamed friends are mentioned by the unnamed narrator of *Written on the Body*. Apart from these two examples, the central narrative pull tends to come from the themes of families and mysterious origins. Adoption is a concern in *Oranges*, *Sexing the Cherry* and *The Powerbook*. Obscure parentage is included in *Art and Lies* and it is only in *The Passion* and *Gut Symmetries* where the narrators are assigned biological parents. By asserting the extent to which Winterson depends on the family thematically it becomes evident that this area must be included when discussing love in her work.

When the main protagonists are adopted children, and the biological tie between child and parent has been severed, the familial bond continues to have a firm grip on the narrator who often speaks as a child rather than a parent. This has the effect of demanding that it is love, rather than biological ties, which creates and maintains the connection with the past. Jeanette's relationship with her adoptive mother is the central focus of family life in *Oranges*. This is also where the tie to the past is most often disclosed.

Lynn Pykett's 'A New Way With Words?' highlights how Winterson's use of orphans belongs to a literary heritage that Winterson cannot quite relinquish. Winterson's reliance on a form that she does not trust holds parallels with Jeanette's irrevocable tie to her mother:

Like the nineteenth century novel, which she so fiercely criticises in *Art Objects*, Winterson's fiction is peopled by orphans or with substituted or depleted families: Jeanette is adopted, Jordan is a foundling, and Henri makes up stories about the extended family which he does not have, a lack which distinguishes him from the rest of the village. (54)

By drawing on these similarities with the nineteenth century novel Winterson is demonstrating how impossible it is to ever fully separate from the past. She is also broadening the potential of a story that revolves around an orphan by giving hers the opportunity to love others outside the main frame of the discourse of heterosexual, romantic love. Jordan and Henri are figures that challenge the dominance of masculinity in Western thinking and romantic love. Jeanette is a means to disturb the supposed naturalness of becoming a wife. As an orphan she is given a limited amount of freedom with which to question the events and lives around her. This is because without biological ties she becomes a spectator, at least theoretically, and is relieved of a certain amount of responsibility.

Oranges is a Bildungsroman, as it is based on Jeanette telling the story of her upbringing until leaving her hometown to go to university. Its chapters are chronologically named after the first eight books of the Old Testament. Dreams and fairy tales are additional narrative supports and these embellish Jeanette's heroism as she tells her coming-out story and describes leaving home. Jeanette uses her own invented fairy tales, as well as the stories she is told as a child, to drive the narrative

onwards. The influences from her childhood are acknowledged; Jeanette learns to read from the book of Deuteronomy with mother's guidance and this reappears as a chapter title. The adult Jeanette no longer accepts these influences as willingly as her former self does, but their appearance nevertheless demonstrates a continued affiliation with her past.

The importance of influence, in particular the strength of her mother's love, is evident in *Oranges* when Jeanette finally arrives at university, at "the ancient city" (*O* 156). After somebody in the city asks her: "When did you last see your mother?" Jeanette's first reaction is to try to forget her earlier life: "I didn't want to tell her; I thought in this city, a past was precisely that. Past" (*O* 155). A few sentences later Jeanette admits how she thinks about returning home: "There are threads that help you find your way back, and there are threads that intend to bring you back. Mind turns to the pull, it's hard to pull away" (*O* 155). The thread symbolises in this last reference, and in its frequent occurrence in *Oranges* as a whole, the connection of love between the mother and child, and between the past and the present. It represents the umbilical cord and symbolises the love between the mother and the daughter. It is also a lifeline for the one who is lost. It enables her to find her way back home through the maze because of its association with Ariadne. A third reading of the thread emphasises the literary self-consciousness of *Oranges*, as it reminds the reader how Jeanette is colloquially 'spinning a yarn'.

One of the main threads that is intrinsic to *Oranges* is the fairy tale about Winnet Stonejar, who is tricked into being a sorcerer's apprentice. The similarities between Winnet and Jeanette's stories are explicit because Jeanette's mother also wants her daughter to be an apprentice to her faith, as a missionary. Further to this, the invisible thread which Winnet's father ties to her button is emblematic of the relationship

between the mother and daughter in the main narrative of *Oranges*. This is a manufactured bond that still serves to hold the parent and child together. This bond exists even when there has been a physical rift. When Winnet is leaving her adoptive father's castle in presumed disgrace, much as Jeanette leaves her mother's home, Winnet's father disguises himself as a mouse and ties this thread around one of her buttons (*O* 144). Winnet does not notice and this implies that even if the parent's power over the child cannot be seen it is still present. *Oranges* is founded on this invisible connection as Jeanette's rite of passage moves finally toward delineating the necessary but impossible departure from her mother. The thread is a construction and an emblem of love. It also signifies how, for Jeanette and Winnet, the past cannot be erased. It is irrelevant, or so the motif of the thread suggests, if the past or love is constructed. Even though the thread of love is artificial, as an emotion it is depicted as still being very real for Jeanette and Winnet.

Susana Onega reiterates the connection between Jeanette and Winnet in "I'm Telling You Stories, Trust Me" and expands upon the importance of the thread motif:

Like Jeanette, Winnet uses her occult knowledge to teach the villagers and, like her, leads a happy life with her adoptive parent until she falls in love with the wrong person, causing the wizard's apocalyptic rage and her expulsion from the paradisaical *hortus conclusus* where they lived. Yet again, as with Jeanette after her estrangement from the parental home, parent and daughter continue to be inextricably tied by an invisible thread. (143)

Winnet, her father, and the boy stranger with whom she falls in love, and who acts as a catalyst for the disruption between father and daughter, are fantasy versions of Jeanette, mother and the stranger Melanie. By having a father and a potential boyfriend in the fairy tale, gender and sexuality are mostly put aside to concentrate on

the story of the parent's ownership of the child. Paulina Palmer, in *Contemporary Lesbian Writing*, also reads this tale of Winnet and her father as exemplifying a concern with power rather than gender: "The fact that a gender displacement occurs and the figure of the mother is represented not by a witch but by a male wizard, universalizes the theme of power relations between parent and child and illustrates Winterson's refusal to be tied to biologicistic assumptions" (102). There is then a switch in gender in the fairy tale, but the story remains the same. As Onega points out in her previously cited quotation, both daughters are punished for loving the wrong people. This sin connects Winnet to Jeanette and, elaborating on Palmer's point, there is a universalizing *not only* of power relations, but also of the desire for the freedom to love.

Jeanette and Winnet are foundlings and the parallels between them are furthered by the mother's and the sorcerer's refusals to explain the truth about their children's origins. The truth of the children's life stories depend on which versions their parents give them. The parents are described from the child's (Jeanette's) position and are criticised for abusing the power of discourse. The sorcerer, for example, becomes the only parent Winnet has ever known: "She forgot how she had come there, or what she had done before" (O 141). Winnet believes the past that her father has constructed for her, and it is only his jealous love that has separated them by a thread. He controls her presence and absence: "She believed that she had always been in the castle, and that she was the sorcerer's daughter. He told her she was. That she had no mother, but had been specifically entrusted to his care by a powerful spirit" (O 141). The indirect allusions to Jeanette's mother are apparent because the 'powerful spirit' is the same inspiration that drives mother to adopt a child.

Jeanette's mother mystifies the details of her daughter's birth just as the sorcerer clouds Winnet's past. The "Awful Occasion" when Jeanette's biological mother visits the house is made all the more Awful as Jeanette realises that the truth about her origins has been denied her: "The Awful Occasion was the time my natural mother had come to claim me back" (O 98). This quotation and the passage it is drawn from baldly summarise Jeanette's roots and the hold that her adoptive mother has over her. Mother's words have made Jeanette her own and she (mother) describes the visitor as a "carrying case" (O 99). *Oranges* barely dwells on this episode and it is concluded thus: "When I finally went home that day, my mother was watching television. She never spoke of what had happened and neither did I" (O 99). Jeanette does not go on to search for her lost (birth) mother or even mention her and it is as though she and the novel accept that biology is only one aspect of mothering. By never speaking of the Awful Occasion again she makes a significant, almost palpable absence in the novel. Jeanette does not try to re-create another beginning for herself in opposition to her adoptive mother. Instead she appears to submit to coping with the version that she has been offered.

This apparent submission is reinforced by the suggestions that whilst growing up Jeanette viewed her mother as omnipotent. Her mother's reason for adopting Jeanette is given as a mission to "get a child, train it, build it, dedicate it to the Lord" (O 10). Mother is also compared to Zeus and Mary. The negative power of discourse is revealed by this sinister characterisation of the mother by the daughter. What makes this sinister is the implication that both mother and daughter are willing to use language to shape perspectives and subjectivities. Mothering is compared to manipulation as though mother is as powerful as a God. However, even in the face of such unassailable authority Jeanette manages to become the author of her own life by

criticising her mother. Because of this she becomes the heroine of her own story despite her upbringing. The belief in the individual is the conservative underpinning of this Bildungsroman.

Jeanette does not totally surrender herself to her mother's fictions, then. She has her own stories that help her to escape from the present. Winnet's tale, for example, is a cipher for revealing how story-telling can be used to attempt to make sense of and challenge the past. In addition to this, Palmer recounts how a student in a seminar that Palmer gave on *Oranges* observed that the use of Winnet's story in relation to the dispute between mother and Jeanette, "renders its pain bearable and enable[s] Jeanette to view it with a degree of emotional detachment" (*Contemporary* 102). This idea of making the pain bearable is attractive, especially as the last chapter of *Oranges*, 'Ruth', is shared between Winnet, Jeanette and Sir Perceval. It cuts abruptly from one story to the other as though indicating that the narration has become too difficult. Winnet's life acts as a breathing space to relate the breakdown in the mother/daughter relationship.

The other intertexts also allow for an exhibition of control or at least the illusion of control. Sir Perceval first appears in the penultimate chapter, 'Judges', and his re-emergence in 'Ruth' enables Jeanette to insist quietly that she is aligning herself with heroism and courtly love. She is also placing herself mythically on the side of righteousness. Henri, in *The Passion*, is another Wintersonian character who is depicted as righteous and his resemblance to Jeanette is examined in further detail in the next chapter of this thesis.

Jeanette's method of relating her path to individuation through fairy tales is a continuation of the tradition she has been raised in. The rupture with mother is doubly signified by both Jeanette's and Winnet's stories but the way these are recounted

resembles mother's ability to tell more than one story at once, or, at times, not the whole story. Mother and daughter both shift from the present narrative and deviate to other issues. The Introduction of *Oranges* warns the reader of this when it states that the novel's interests are "anti-linear" and that it can be read in "spirals" (xiii). According to Sara Ruddick, the telling of stories could explain the bond, or thread, that joins mothers and daughters together: "Children are shaped by – some would say imprisoned in – the stories they are first told. But it is also true that storytelling at its best enables children to adapt, edit, and invent life stories of their own" (98). Jeanette's descriptions of mother's story-telling techniques are just as true of the style of *Oranges* and, bearing Ruddick's point in mind, the connection between parent and child is observable:

Quite often, she'd start to tell me a story and then go on to something else in the middle, so I never found out what happened to the Earthly Paradise when it stopped being off the coast of India, and I was stuck at 'six sevens are forty-two' for almost a week. (*O* 16)

Biologically speaking, mother and daughter are separate entities. They are, however, at times identical in their method of preaching. To convert another to her faith is essentially mother's desire. She uses conversion stories as entertainment and as a form of instruction. She thinks of herself as a missionary on the home front and her daughter is a potential extension of this vocation.

When Jeanette changes her mind and no longer wants to be a missionary her mother's reaction is illogical yet typical of her paradoxical character. Mother's "complicated mind" could never quite stop wishing that Jeanette would be a missionary (*O* 126). Even after Jeanette's exorcism, which is instigated because of her love for Melanie, mother is additionally deflated when Jeanette says she could preach

just as well at home as abroad. Mother's reply typifies her illogicality: "Oh you'll get married and get involved" (O 126). Jeanette continues, "she was very bitter. Odd that I was obviously not going to get married. I thought at first she would have been pleased" (O 126). The lack of mutual understanding between mother and daughter is inscribed in mother's disappointment that Jeanette will get married and consequently become less involved in the church. It also comically challenges hypocrisy by voicing Jeanette's misguided belief that her mother would be pleased that she was a lesbian (because this is why she obviously was not going to get married). Jeanette's summary of her mother explains why there are misunderstandings between this parent and child: "My mother has always given me problems because she is enlightened and reactionary at the same time" (O 126). It could be argued 'like mother like daughter' in that the structure of *Oranges* depends on the Old Testament for its chapter titles and general framework, but its subject matter depends mostly on the theme of lesbian love in defiance of the heterosexual bias of the Bible. The daughter and the mother thrive on paradox.

This paradoxical stance is evident in Jeanette's love for her mother. As she narrates the grievances against her mother Jeanette occasionally becomes her in her preaching style. Jeanette also resists an entirely negative portrait of her mother. The fairy tale of the "brilliant and beautiful" princess directly precedes mother's dream of adopting a child to do the Lord's work and this story is the most sympathetic to mother's initial hope when adopting Jeanette. This is because a hunchback asks the princess to take over her duties, and "the princess agreed to stay and forgot all about the palace and the moths" (O 10). The princess forgets her former life just as Winnet does, but this earlier story is less sinister on the subject of the amnesia that is coterminous with starting a new life and leaving the past behind. At this stage in the

novel there is a hopeful tinge to mother's dream because of this tale. It is also one of the rare moments in *Oranges* that establishes why Jeanette was adopted from mother's perspective.

Comparing the princess, who is happy to continue the hunchback's work, with Winnet's escape from her adopted father, we can see that a dramatic shift occurs in the figurative re-enactment of Jeanette's growth. There is a movement away from wanting to preserve mother's ideals towards a revelation of disillusionment for both the mother and daughter. These two allegories, of the princess and Winnet, originate from the realm of childhood and they draw on the language and typical characters of a fairy tale. It is as though Jeanette believes that a realist landscape is not sufficient for portraying her story and so uses fantasy to explain the loss of the distant past that occurs with adoption. An adopted child is given a new identity forged on selection rather than biology and the other world of the fairy story re-imagines what might have happened without betraying the adoptive mother's love.

Jeanette is, however, narrating these tales and is therefore shaping the moral direction the reader ought to take. Just as her mother has the power to re-imagine the ending of *Jane Eyre* to fit her own conclusion, rather than Charlotte Brontë's, Jeanette manipulates the depiction of her life. Jeanette's inventive use of fiction means that her perceived manipulation by mother is driven home two-fold. The control of language shifts within the narrative from mother to daughter when Jeanette learns to read and discovers the true ending of *Jane Eyre* for herself (O 73). The disappointment that Jeanette feels at this time is heightened when she compares the upset experienced with this revelation, with finding her adoption papers (O 73). Literacy distances Jeanette from her mother's version of events and this consequently empowers her.

In “‘I’m Telling You Stories, Trust Me’” Onega contrasts Winterson’s use of fantasy and dreams with that of other authors. One may also add mother to this list of ‘other authors’: “In the hands of realism-biased writers, the fulfilment of the characters’ innermost desires – especially those of female characters – is often attained in the unreal realm of fantasy and dreams” (142). Onega refers to Jane Austen and George Eliot (and their “romance-reading heroines”) as examples of such writers and then goes on to query these heroines in comparison with Winterson’s Jeanette:

However, in this kind of realistic fiction, the heroines themselves simultaneously deny and repress their desires in the real world, thus transforming the subversive potential of their reveries and wish-fulfilment dreams into pure escapism while condemning desire as illusory and unattainable. In contrast, Jeanette Winterson’s insistence on the truth-revealing power of story-telling works in the contrary direction, levelling reality and unreality to the same category and so creating a space of epistemological no-woman’s-land where her lesbian heroine can truly fulfil her innermost desires and bring about her process of maturation.

(143)

By conflating ‘reality’ with ‘unreality’ Jeanette assumes control over her life story and decides that her desires are valid. Mother, on the other hand, is comparable to the heroines that Onega describes, who prefer to repress and condemn their desires. Mother’s love for her own version of *Jane Eyre* confirms this analogy. Onega’s term, ‘no-woman’s-land’, foregrounds the image of a paradoxically gendered yet neutral zone on a battlefield that Jeanette and Winterson are searching for, in opposition to the mother. The impossibility of this task emphasises the struggle Jeanette has to find

a peaceful space of her own making. Mother's taste for realism influences Jeanette, but as with Winterson, realism is ultimately a dishonest vehicle for art.

Keryn Carter's reading of *Oranges* argues that Jeanette has two mothers. One of them is her adoptive mother; the other is the novel *Jane Eyre*. The revised story that Jeanette is told in her formative years is yet another unavoidable thread of the novel. Mother prefers to believe that Jane marries St. John, rather than returning to Mr. Rochester. Keryn Carter points out how difficult it is for Jeanette to separate herself from the influence of the mother and the story she tells her:

Although both "mothers" have proclaimed their separateness, Jeanette – as the daughter of both – is in the position of being constrained by both mothers. The framework of the mother's desires is difficult to escape, but so too is the narrative paradigm of *Jane Eyre*. Both mothers threaten her identity even as they define it. (20)

If we combine Onega's claims with Keryn Carter's, the influence of mother's version of *Jane Eyre* becomes all the more powerful as mother's version of reality intrudes into Jeanette's life.

Jeanette describes the double bind between the mother and daughter as an irrevocable connection: "Families, real ones, are chairs and tables and the right number of cups, but I had no means of joining one, and no means of dismissing my own; she had tied a thread around my button, to tug when she pleased" (*O* 171). Jeanette's growth into adulthood is shadowed by this tie and by the threat of the thread being tugged. The effectiveness of parental, and in this case motherly, bonding rests on the power of the adult. Patricia Duncker's 'Jeanette Winterson and the Aftermath of Feminism' also quotes the above section from *Oranges*. Duncker interprets the button as the 'belly button' and the thread as the umbilical cord, and

states, “the adored dominating mother must always be left behind, but her influence is inescapable” (83). Duncker expands on this to offer a broadly psychoanalytic analysis of Jeanette’s relationship with her mother:

For most of us, our first overwhelming experience of love is for our parents. Our love may not be returned. We may in fact have a harrowing experience of rejection and frustration in our first love. But our love for our parent, or parents, whatever their sex, or indeed their sexual orientation, is also a relationship of dependency and possession. They own us. (83)

The ‘helplessness’ of the child’s desire is perceived by Duncker as being evident in the relationship between Jeanette and her mother, and she understands this as a reflection of the universal sensation of what it is to be a child in a family.

The concept of the child as victim diminishes a little on reading Nancy Friday’s *My Mother My Self*. Friday claims that “true love” between mother and daughter is one that acknowledges “ambivalence” (2). Ambivalence becomes a key word for Friday and is a prescription for a healthy separation between mother and daughter, because this allows the daughter to love others: “Having mother’s permission to love and emulate others, a daughter will naturally seek people who will love her back. This is separation working at its best, the beginning of self-esteem” (12). The thread tied to Winnet’s button, and attached to Jeanette, may be understood as Jeanette’s technique for apportioning blame to mother for forcing the child to love the parent perfectly and above all others (except for God). A warning from Friday makes it difficult to recognise Jeanette’s mother as the only ‘guilty’ party, particularly once the child has become an adult:

In the name of fairness, and reality too, let me add an important postscript which is true not only for this chapter but of this book as a whole: looking over our shoulder at what mother may or may not have done so many years ago locks us into the past. “She did it. There is nothing I can do about it.” *Blaming mother keeps us passive, tied to her*. It helps us avoid taking responsibility for ourselves. (83)

Passivity is what ties the child to her mother in Friday’s opinion and this disrupts the idea that it is only the mother (or the sorcerer) in *Oranges* who is responsible for tying the thread; the daughter must also allow this to happen. Winnet is unaware of the thread being tied and as an allegorical representative for Jeanette this symbolises the child negating responsibility. The portrayal of mother in *Oranges* as all-powerful also tends to shift the burden of blame from the daughter to the mother. Jeanette is in danger of being ‘locked in the past’ and into the passivity that Friday observes. Winterson is similarly ‘locked’ to earlier literary concerns as *The Powerbook* is all the more forceful in its critique of parents. Although I also argue that Jeanette shares traits with her mother there is a constant theme running like a thread through *Oranges*, which claims mother is the creator, the author even, of Jeanette’s life.

The creator is traditionally seen as God and this myth is destabilised again in Winterson’s next novel, *Boating for Beginners*, when Noah accidentally creates the Almighty; it is the Almighty who calls Noah ‘mother’. Yahweh is a comparable fictional re-creation of Jeanette, especially when her passivity begins to fade in her search for independence. He is also a comic representation of Winterson’s ongoing interest in how parental power can positively or negatively mould the child. Jeanette’s mother is often described in *Oranges* as though she is omnipotent and in *Boating for Beginners* even the Unpronounceable’s parent acts like God the creator.

The hardening of Jeanette's heart, which makes her independence possible, is symbolised in the latter part of the novel with a brown pebble. Winnet's favourite raven Abednego coughs up his heart, which is also a pebble, and gives it to her as a talisman. It is also a territory marker for Winnet when she first tries to protect herself from the sorcerer. Jeanette is given a pebble by her orange demon and also picks one up when walking with Katy. This occurs when it is clear that Jeanette will be demonised again by her community for continuing to have lesbian relationships. The pebble signifies the ambivalence that Friday mentions, where there can be no such thing as perfect true love. It represents the need to harden inside to be able to bear the realisation that perfect love is an idealisation and not a possible reality. This is also what the prince discovers when searching for the perfect flawless wife, but finds a copy of *Frankenstein* instead.

The brown pebble that represents a hardened heart allows Jeanette to love herself as an individual. It also continues the separation implicit in their mother/daughter relationship. Jessica Benjamin's *The Bonds of Love* proceeds from the tenet that women's lack of subject status is the obstacle that prevents women, men and children from reaching intersubjectivity. Simply put, intersubjectivity is a claim for pleasure that is concerned with sharing feelings and escaping from domination. It asks for the action of mutual recognition (Benjamin 31). Benjamin understands that, "the recognition a child seeks is something the mother is able to give only by virtue of her independent identity" (24). Benjamin's methodology is grounded in the following: "Above all, this book seeks to understand how domination is anchored in the hearts of the dominated" (6). Benjamin relies on the Hegelian master-slave dichotomy for explaining the bonds of love and delineates how intersubjectivity is the means by which this hierarchy may be overcome. For Benjamin, the submissive party has to

realise his/her part in the role of being dominated, and the brown pebble may be understood as a representative for a marker that keeps passivity at bay. The pebble's talismanic effect is diminished, however, when considering how Jeanette is ultimately tied to her God and mother in relationships that are modelled on the binary of master/slave.

Benjamin and *Oranges* recognise how difficult it is to escape the bonds of domination completely. In terms of class and gender, Jeanette and her mother lack status. This perspective comes about from reading against the grain of *Oranges* though, as Jeanette states: "The women in our church were strong and organized. If you want to talk in terms of power I had enough to keep Mussolini happy" (*O* 121). When Jeanette is placed in "ecclesiastical quarantine" it becomes transparent how limited this power is (*O* 131). Within the ultimately misogynistic confines of the church, mother's power is diluted. This is most evident when she bows to St. Paul's judgement and concedes that women should not be preaching. Mother and Jeanette are conclusively at the mercy of a higher, patriarchal, authority and for as long as this position remains they will stay opposed to each other according to the system of divide and rule. Their love can never be intersubjective whilst divided by patriarchy/phallogocentricity.

Both men and women are criticised in *Oranges* as conformist as far as marriage is concerned. This is particularly evident in the women who marry because it is expected of them. When, for example, Jeanette hides in the dustbin to eavesdrop on Nellie and Doreen, she hears Doreen complain about her husband, "'course the children helped. I ignored him for fifteen years'" (*O* 74). Tellingly, Doreen cuts from this complaint to say how she is worried that her daughter Jane is spending too much time with a female friend, "If they're not careful folk will think they're like them two at the

paper shop” (O 74). These two women live together and are known to share a bed. Within the same conversation Doreen shifts from saying how marriage for her has been an unhappy experience to wishing the same predicament on her daughter. The conversation between the two women demonstrates the absurdity of compulsory heterosexual coupling. It also reminds one of Benjamin’s idea of the dominated anchoring domination in their hearts and Friday’s critique of passivity, as Doreen is an accomplice to domination in desiring her daughter’s conformity.

Jeanette carefully distances herself from only blaming men of her own class for the uneven balance of power in a marriage. This is a reminder that even in this first novel Winterson takes care not to be trapped by the earlier feminist binary assumptions that males and females are opposed. There is no specific hatred against the other in the pair. There is instead an interest in how love becomes warped. Laura Doan analyses *Oranges*’ preoccupation with binaries as such:

The simple transposition of the binary in *Oranges* (lesbianism = natural and therefore good; heterosexuality = unnatural, perhaps evil) paves the way for more complex strategies with which Winterson will neutralize heteropatriarchal authority and begin to map an alternative social order, one that positions lesbian at the center. (145)

Doan believes *Oranges* is not as complex in its strategy as Winterson’s later novels but I think Doan’s measure of what is complex arises from a desire to see Winterson deconstructing binary thinking. Doan later suggests that the task for the lesbian writer is to “displace and explode the binary” (147), and reads *Oranges* as revealing but not eliminating the pairing. If *Oranges* were a utopian lesbian novel of development Doan’s prescriptive advice would have more applicability. *Oranges* does not, however, have utopian dreams as a theme. It is a novel that exposes the fragility of the

concept of normality, but it never claims that Jeanette is capable of overriding Western attitudes and power structures. The novel removes itself from the binary male versus female argument, but binary thinking remains intact because of the daughter's inability to see beyond her mother's failings. This may be another example of the thread being tugged, this time by the daughter, as she cannot quite manage to leave behind the master/slave relationship with mother. It also represents the impossibility of completely escaping binary thought. Jeanette's individuation comes about through her own 'heroic' decisions and self-discipline and as she 'authors' her own story. *Oranges*, however, maintains the binary of master and slave as Jeanette complies with her mother's political position, which depends on a belief in self-improvement. Doan also recognises that Jeanette and her mother share similar tastes in their political outlooks:

She may be misunderstood by the pastor, her mother, and others, but the misunderstanding is their flaw, their problem. However, because she is caught up in the binary logic of her mother's (and the church's) version of the natural order, Jeanette never fully comprehends the political threat embedded in her actions; she can challenge those who question her right to love Melanie, but she cannot break out of the binarism - she is, after all, her mother's daughter. (145)

When Jeanette insists on blaming her mother for the wrongs that have been inflicted on her it is possible to realise how tied Jeanette ultimately is to oppositionary thought. This is observable in the fabric of *Oranges* as it depends on the Old Testament for its framework. This reiterates Jeanette's fundamental immersion in the good/evil binary. Her father and mother are also characterised as divided in oppositional terms. Father is typically observed as passive, "my father liked to watch

wrestling, my mother liked to wrestle; it didn't matter what" (*O* 3). In opposition, her mother is the active parent who is perceived as betraying Jeanette: "If there's such a thing as spiritual adultery, my mother was a whore" (*O* 132). Mother's betrayal is justified by St. Paul when she states that "the message belonged to the men" (*O* 131), which implicates the New as well as the Old Testament in the subjugation of Jeanette's passions. Mother becomes the voice for the religion they serve, "she ended by saying that having taken on a man's world in other ways I had flouted God's law and tried to do it sexually" (*O* 131). The curious aspect to this passage is Jeanette's inability to move beyond mother to blame the religion for being at fault for punishing Jeanette's sexuality. Her loyalty to preaching is blind. She is still the child who is fully dependent on a parent: "So there I was, my success in the pulpit being the reason for my downfall. The devil had attacked me at my weakest point: my inability to realize the limitations of my sex" (*O* 132). This last sentence is ironic, but its wording also suggests that Jeanette cannot grasp the fact that the message she has been preaching is the same one that has been used to punish her. The religion is as difficult to escape from as a parent. By accusing her mother instead of deconstructing the religion they both serve, Jeanette is resisting the passivity of martyrdom but she is also perilously close to becoming as myopic and inconsistent as her mother.

Because Jeanette consistently draws on the thread motif and is finally tugged back to see her mother, *Oranges* conclusively embraces mother's love as inevitable. Interestingly, Jeanette is reading Eliot's *Middlemarch* on the train journey she takes when travelling back home for Christmas. This minor detail reminds the reader how the thread attached to the daughter is always present in the guise of story-telling, even when this belongs to the realist tradition that Jeanette and Winterson distrust. Nora Tomlinson's view on love in *Middlemarch* offers another reason why this novel is

significant for Jeanette, as her vocation and love interests are also held in tension with each other:

The prelude to *Middlemarch* makes a denigrating reference to ‘favourite love-stories in prose and verse’ (prelude; p4). However, *Middlemarch* is, of course a novel of romance as well as of vocation. Dorothea sees marriage in terms of vocation, and the ideal marriage would be one in which romantic love and vocational aspirations were in harmony. Often, however, the two are shown to be in conflict. (263)

As the heroine of her own story, Jeanette’s conflicting relationship with love is comparable to *Middlemarch*’s equivocation in that Jeanette also wants harmony. The difference is that the harmony Jeanette desires is between heterosexuality and homosexuality and between the fictions of the normal and abnormal.

Jeanette’s final journey home does not make *Oranges* a straightforward novel of forgiveness. After her first collision with the Church and her mother, which arises from the discovery of her affair with Melanie, mother finds and burns all of Jeanette’s letters, cards and jottings. Jeanette’s reaction is explicitly unforgiving:

There are different sorts of treachery, but betrayal is betrayal wherever you find it. She burnt a lot more than the letters that night in the backyard. I don’t think she knew. In her head she was still a queen, but not my queen any more, not the White Queen any more (*O* 110).¹

The first sentence of the above quotation, ‘there are different sorts of treachery...’, is echoed in ‘Ruth’ when the pastor tells Jeanette that Melanie did not love her, and that

¹ This reference to the White Queen draws on *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*. Winterson refers to this text again in *Gut Symmetries* and *The Powerbook*. I examine the use of *Alice Through the Looking-Glass* in relation to *The Powerbook* in chapter seven of this thesis.

he knows this because Melanie told him so. Jeanette's response to the pastor replicates her reaction to her mother: "There are different kinds of treachery, but betrayal is betrayal wherever you find it" (*O* 147). Mother and Melanie merge as Judas figures as the accusing words are repeated. If they are both understood as stereotypes of Judas, there is no Christ-like forgiveness by Jeanette once the love has been damaged.

God

The template for the love that Jeanette desires is exemplified by her affection for God.

This love is limitless, pure and transcendental:

I miss God. I miss the company of someone utterly loyal. I still don't think of God as my betrayer. The servants of God, yes, but servants by their very nature betray. I miss God who was my friend. I don't even know if God exists, but I do know that if God is your emotional role model, very few human relationships will match up to it. (*O* 163)

Jeanette's disappointment in mother and Melanie, when counterbalanced with her love for God, demonstrates an unwillingness to relinquish love. It is still a transcendent emotion despite the unhappiness incurred by the disruption in her faith. It is this love for God that permeates the ideal of love in *Oranges* and later Winterson novels.

Irving Singer writes of the idealisation of love and Winterson's work tends towards this perspective, combining the original meanings of Eros and Agape in her proclamation of its value. Agape, according to Anders Nygren, is spontaneous and potentially limitless and is particularised by Christianity as such: "God's love allows no limits to be set for it by the character or conduct of man" (77). This concept of

limitless love is entirely distinct from the hypocritical perspectives of Jeanette's church members. The forgiving of sins and the concept of loving one's neighbour are Pauline tenets that mother's, and Jeanette's, selective theology chooses to ignore. Jeanette's love for Him depends on love transcending constructions that are based on hatred and fear, yet she too cannot forgive the sins of her mother and Melanie for the sake of self-preservation.

Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* is a useful paradigm for highlighting this dichotomy between Jeanette's faith in love and her inability to forgive the sins of others. Freud argues that love and aggression are twin drives, and the following is a timely explanation of why both mother and Jeanette appear to thrive on expelling rather than forgiving: "It is always possible to bind quite large numbers of people together in love, provided that others are left out as targets for aggression" (*Civilization* 50). Jeanette and her mother follow this pattern of exclusion because neither can forgive the sins of others.

The attraction of religion, and the purposes it serves for its devotees, is also explored in *Civilization and its Discontents*. This in turn offers insights into a reading of *Oranges*, as this novel asserts that Jeanette loves God without criticism. Freud's belligerence towards religion offers a welcome contrast to *Oranges'* idealism of God and Jeanette's love for Him:

To me the derivation of religious needs from the helplessness of the child and a longing for its father seems irrefutable, especially as this feeling is not only prolonged from the days of childhood, but constantly sustained by a fear of the superior power of fate. I cannot cite any childish need that is as strong as the need for paternal protection. (*Civilization* 21)

For Jeanette and her mother, God is a representative of a higher being. Using Freud's framework, He plays the role of father. Mother's father excommunicated her because he thought she married below herself (*O* 36), which is also, incidentally, what happened to Jane Eyre's mother. Jeanette's father is mostly an ineffectual background figure, therefore both the mother and the daughter (in *Oranges* and *Jane Eyre*) have absentee fathers. The almost all-female community that Jeanette is raised by is a nuclear family with God as patriarch: "The church is my family," she always said whenever I asked about the people in the photograph album. And the church was my family too." (*O* 36). The authority of the father figure dominates conclusively as it reappears in the worship of God. The faith in a higher being, be that a father or God, is also elemental to *Oranges*' refusal to explode binaries, because of the urge to have faith in hierarchical thinking.

The following extract from *Civilization and its Discontents* is also useful for analysing Jeanette's love for God: "The life imposed on us is too hard for us to bear: it brings too much pain, too many disappointments, too many insoluble problems. If we are to endure it, we cannot do without palliative measures" (13). Love and religion are equivalents in this quotation. Both, in theory, are balms for the difficulties of life. It may of course be equally argued that love and organised religion cause the problems in *Oranges* and 'real' life.

Jeanette's evident love for God explains why she feels so betrayed by mother, when mother has God's unconditional love as a rival. This also returns the discussion to Benjamin's *The Bonds of Love* in that the dominated Jeanette cannot quite leave her subservient position behind. By loving God unconditionally and expecting this in return, Jeanette symbolises a desire to love freely, but she is actually upholding the master/slave binary by loving a higher being.

Benjamin invokes Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* in order to demonstrate how Freud "obscures" the process of domination (4). She unpicks his contradiction between nature and civilisation and claims that he leaves "no exit"; domination appears to be inescapable (4). Where Benjamin agrees with Freud, in his siting of domination in "human relationships" rather than "human nature" (4), a link may also be forged between Freud's text and *Oranges*. This novel recognises the input that discourses have on the formation of a child and in so doing it tends to offer liberation from essentialism. *Oranges* and *Civilization and its Discontents* represent the difficulties inherent in escaping from the discourses that shape the child's life.

After Jeanette declares that 'very few human relationships' will match up to God's love she explains the extent to which she still idealises future relationships:

I have an idea that one day it might be possible, I thought once it had become possible, and that glimpse has set me wandering, trying to find the balance between earth and sky. If the servants hadn't rushed in and parted us, I might have been disappointed, might have snatched off the white samite to find a bowl of soup. As it is, I can't settle, I want someone who is fierce and will love me until death and know that love is as strong as death, and be on my side for ever and ever. I want someone who will destroy and be destroyed by me. (*O* 165)

Jeanette's desire is almost fulfilled in *Written on the Body*, where love and death mingle. As far as only *Oranges* is concerned, this willingness to search and to wander is intrinsic to original platonic love and the tradition of Eros. By parting her from her lovers the 'servants' awaken Jeanette's desire for love. Love is made generic as it sweeps from God to Eros and from Jeanette's mother to Melanie. What unites these different love objects, and different ways of loving, is the underlying desire to idealise

this emotion. The separation of the lover from the beloved is the focus for not only this novel, but also all of the main Winterson novels that are discussed in this thesis. Underneath the disappointment in parent and lover, and included in the shaking of her commitment to God, is the wish for unification.

When considering Jeanette's idealisation of love the paradox, which is literally at the heart of *Oranges*, becomes apparent. In the central chapter, 'Deuteronomy', there is an attack on the dishonesty of a unified reading. It pushes for plural interpretations rather than reading on only one level. This call for plurality is in keeping with Jeanette's wish for limitless love, but it jars against Jeanette's desire for a love that unites. 'Deuteronomy' attacks the version of history that claims to be able to show the facts, and argues instead that history only offers a version of events:

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 a string full of knots. (O 91)

Those who refuse a discursive, plural view of the world are found to be lacking and mother is one of the unmentioned targets. Paradoxically, Jeanette's love for God and desire for unity resembles her mother's perspective. Both the mother and the daughter are deferential in their love for Him. The references to string and knots emphasise the complication of the thread motif because threads can tangle, just as Jeanette's logic is tangled up in deconstruction and deference.

The past, as a thread, a string, or history is also represented as complex when stories, as lies, confound the truth. The tendency to use language as a means of control, which is necessary when preaching, is evident in the lie about *Jane Eyre*, in Jeanette's

reaction to finding out she has been adopted, and also in mother's literal readings of the Bible. As far as mother's faith is concerned there is no swaying from the truth, but it is only the truth as she sees it. The devotion to truth appears to rest on what is perceived as holy, but this allegiance to honesty is not maintained when explaining Jeanette's birth. This contradiction reveals the lie implicit in mother's shortsightedness. The promise of truth is present in the evangelical worship that they are both committed to. The contradictory behaviour of betraying a loved one haunts Jeanette, but Jeanette in turn betrays her mother by relating her own version of the story of her life. *Oranges* is the daughter's opportunity to take the mother's place. The full title, *Oranges are not the Only Fruit*, is an indication that this is, at least in part, a criticism of mother's entrenched views. And this suggests that it is the daughter's version that is the most valid, that is, the most truthful. The complexity of the thread that ties Jeanette to her mother insists that Jeanette is as dependent on hierarchical thinking as her mother is.

Winterson's idealisation of love stands apart from the postmodern/poststructuralist deconstruction of history in 'Deuteronomy', as Jeanette's desire to love requires subject status and the notion of the individual. Onega understands *Oranges* as asking for history to be accepted as individual memory and places this as a modernist concern, which ties in with the continued subject status of lover and beloved (140). There are certainly influences from modernism and postmodernism in 'Deuteronomy' and it is more precise to acknowledge that Winterson is a writer who uses past and present literary devices to tell her stories, rather than attempting to place her work in a specific category.²

² This point is examined more closely in chapter three of this thesis.

To write about love a belief has to be maintained that the lover and beloved have subject status. Stevi Jackson's 'Women and Heterosexual Love' is in agreement with the idea that to love is to enter into the realm of humanism and the delusion of individual wholeness. Jackson recognises how love relies on humanism for viability: "While ideal love is often thought of as a merging of selves, it presupposes the prior existence of two distinct selves" (51). This belief in Winterson's novels may be illusory or essentialised, or a case of unmentioned provisional subjectivity. Or it may be, as Onega warns, verging on solipsism (140).

The full extent of *Oranges*' paradoxical awareness of constructions and how these become reified into power relationships is evident in the following quotation. This reference exemplifies how, for Jeanette, being a lover has parallels with being God: "There are many forms of love and affection, some people spend their whole lives together without knowing each other's names. Naming is a difficult and time-consuming process; it concerns essences, and it means power. But on the wild nights who can call you home? Only the one who knows your name" (*O* 165). Jeanette is unashamedly comparing the power of a lover with God's love. This power is one that she has learned in her relationship with her mother. God's love and mother's love are interpreted by Jeanette as codes for assuming authority and establishing dependency. The relationship with Melanie differs in negotiating the deconstruction of such hierarchical, master/slave thinking. It is in the articulation of homosexuality that *Oranges* attempts to remove itself from this dichotomy. This removal can never be realised, though, as this act of deconstruction (heterosexuality/homosexuality) occurs in isolation from the love of and for God and mother.

Melanie

In 'Joshua' Jeanette has a dream in which she finally reaches the city of Lost Chances and is told she has already made the Fundamental Mistake (*O* 109). This is a re-writing of judgement day, where her 'sin' has already decided her fate. The absurdity of her bookshop surroundings in this dream underplay the seriousness of how Jeanette has just recently been judged by her community because of her relationship with Melanie. The dream heightens the surreal aspect of the exorcism that has been performed on her. It also metaphorically gestures to the isolation that has come about through betrayal. The 'epistemological no-woman's-land' that Onega believes Jeanette creates with dreams and fantasies as she grows up is also a lonely place.

An earlier dream, in 'Numbers', vividly enacts how Jeanette is afraid of marriage. The accepted wisdom passed down to Jeanette by family and friends declares that Jeanette will one day find a husband:

Everyone always said you found the right man.

My mother said it, which was confusing.

My auntie said it, which was even more confusing.

The man in the post office sold it on sweets. (*O* 20)

The recurring dream appears at the beginning of 'Numbers' and at first it appears that Jeanette is a bride to be: "It was spring, the ground still had traces of snow, and I was about to be married" (*O* 69). As the husband turns to kiss the bride it becomes clearer that this is a dream: "Sometimes he was blind, sometimes a pig, sometimes my mother, sometimes the man from the post office, and once, just a suit of clothes with nothing inside" (*O* 69). This dream sequence explains Jeanette's confusion, which is seen literally when Jeanette climbs out of the dustbin after eavesdropping on Nellie

and Doreen and decides, “it was a good thing I was destined to become a missionary” (O 75). The mixed messages of marriage and unhappiness are confusing and it takes a child’s point of view to reveal how ridiculous it is to hope people will live together, forever, because it is natural and expected of them. Jeanette’s dream makes her comparable to the boy in ‘The Emperor’s New Clothes’, because the dream is aware of how arbitrary happy marriage is. Marriage is the legalised sanctioning of heterosexual relations and Jeanette’s dream ‘innocently’ differentiates this from love. Jeanette decides to put aside “the problem of men” to concentrate on the Bible after listening to her neighbours, but then says how she fell in love some years later “quite by mistake” (O 75).

This innocence continues in the relationship between Jeanette and Melanie as Jeanette avoids being sexually explicit in the description of their love-making. In ‘Numbers’, she introduces Melanie as the accidental lover and builds up to the scene where they make love for the first time: “She stroked my head for a long time, and then we hugged and it felt like drowning. Then I was frightened but I couldn’t stop. There was something crawling in my belly. I had an octopus inside me.” (O 86). This outlines a romantic rather than sexual entanglement and bolsters Jeanette’s characterisation as the naïve lover.

Jeanette asks Melanie, “do you think this is Unnatural Passion?” (O 86). It does not feel awful, as Pastor Finch describes it, so they agree it cannot be. The naivety, like the dream of different husbands, turns over the church’s logic and makes a space for validating innocence in the face of bigotry. It feels natural, not unnatural, and is therefore beyond admonishment. In terms of Agape, Jeanette is asking for limitless love and not to be judged. This is expanded on further by Doan’s recognition of how Winterson posits homosexuality as normal in this novel.

Mother sees her daughter as “aping men” because of her love affairs with women (*O* 125). Just prior to this, mother states that she wants Jeanette to move out of the family home and, according to her, the pastor and most of the congregation support mother. Jeanette’s view is that, “it all seemed to hinge around the fact that I loved the wrong sort of people” (*O* 125).

With the invocation of love Jeanette righteously defends her sexuality because love belongs to a Western tradition that has Plato and Christianity as support. Jeanette’s excommunication also partly hinges on her mother’s inability to understand what love is and the mother consequently becomes the ‘abnormal’ one. This abnormality is exaggerated by a ridiculing of the mother’s lack of loving relationships. Passion is absent from Jeanette’s parents’ relationship. It is compared to working shifts where one goes to bed as the other gets up. The mother’s story about Pierre perhaps best epitomises her ignorance about affairs of the heart. This is where she misinterprets a stomach ulcer, with all its fizzing and bubbling, for love (*O* 85).

Hilary Hinds points out that the mainstream critics of *Oranges* de-centre the lesbian relationship in the novel and the televised version. Hinds mainly focuses her discussion on the critical reception of the television play and argues that, “as with the novel, the de-centring of the lesbianism does not involve its denial: in most accounts of the storyline it is mentioned, but nearly always in relation to something else, generally the ensuing rejection and exorcism of Jess by members of the evangelical group” (61). Hinds’ research demonstrates that the fundamentalism of the evangelical group attracted more negative criticism than the lesbian love scenes. She notes how only one reviewer in the quality press (Mark Steyn) mentioned Jeanette’s relationship with both Melanie and Katy (63).³

³ In the *Independent*, 25 Jan. 1990.

Hinds makes the claim that the de-centring of lesbianism in the reviews of both the novel and the screenplay tends to eliminate this central aspect of both versions, and it is possible that this chapter has not focussed sufficiently on the theme of lesbianism either. In defence of this one could look to the seemingly casual way in which Jeanette understands that the rift between her and her mother has come about because she loves the ‘wrong sort of people’, and thinks that her falling in love with Melanie is an accident. When these examples are added together, Winterson appears to be adopting a register that refuses to make *Oranges* a Bible for a lesbian novel of development. The critics sidelined the theme of lesbianism, but so does the author, and the re-naming of Jeanette to Jess for the televised version of *Oranges* may also be read as a further indication of this distancing. In the Introduction to *Oranges* Winterson only touches on Jeanette’s sexuality, whilst proceeding to universalise her story:

Everyone, at some time in their life, must choose whether to stay with a ready-made world that may be safe but which is also limiting, or to push forward, often past the frontiers of commonsense, into a personal place, unknown and untried. In *Oranges* this quest is one of sexuality as well as individuality. Superficially, it seems specific: an evangelical girl whose world is overturned because she falls in love with another young girl. In fact, *Oranges* deals absolutely with emotions and confrontations that none of us can avoid. (*O* xiv)

Hinds’ argument that lesbianism should not be de-centred is based on believing this to be contrary to Winterson’s wishes, but this is evidently not quite so straightforward.

Winterson is careful to separate her work from her sexuality and may therefore reject Doan’s earlier cited argument that lesbian writers should be exploding binaries.

‘Winnet’ tantalisingly links Winterson more firmly to the text, as her full name is an anagram of Winterson’s, and adds weights to reading *Oranges* as semi-autobiographical. It also encourages an authentication of the ‘coming-out’ aspect of the novel when allying the author’s sexuality with the narrator’s. Conversely, when understanding Winnet as an ironical trope *Oranges* is still a work of fiction rather than a recording of Winterson’s life.⁴ In *Art Objects* Winterson refuses to be drawn on describing *Oranges* as autobiographical and says that she cannot understand how anyone can read ‘Deuteronomy’, and “not catch on to my game” (*AO* 53). This is ‘the last book of the law’ and as such makes the last word reveal new ways of reading the past instead of the literal interpretations of the Bible that Jeanette has grown up with.

Winterson pays homage to Woolf and Stein in *Art Objects* and to their use of what she calls the ‘Trojan horse’ of biography and autobiography to “stash the word” (*AO* 50). Applying this idea to Winterson’s *Oranges*, ‘Deuteronomy’ may be read as the point at which the Trojan horse opens to reveal that what appears to be Winterson’s life is just another story. Whether Winterson is a lesbian or not, the novel itself is concerned with homophobia, and lesbian love is the catalyst for Jeanette’s expulsion from her home and church. This is perhaps as much validation as is needed when querying whether lesbianism should be de-centred or not in a reading of *Oranges*.

When separating Winterson’s life from her art, Hinds’ argument that lesbianism should not be de-centred is valid when reading the text as a whole, with or without Winterson’s affirmation. It is Jeanette’s sexuality that causes the mother to oust Jeanette from the home when she will not repent. The only members of the church

⁴ On Winterson’s official website, www.jeanettewinterson.com, and in the introduction to *Oranges*, Winterson equivocates as to whether it is an autobiographical novel or not. On her website, at ‘Books’, (http://jeanettewinterson.com/pages/books/oranges_are_not.html) she continues to discuss the issue in gendered terms: “I have noticed that when women writers put themselves into their fiction, it’s called autobiography. When men do it...it’s metafiction”.

who approach an understanding of Jeanette's sexuality are those who have read Havelock Ellis and think that Jeanette cannot help herself (*O* 126). Lesbianism is the undercurrent of Jeanette's childhood world. She is prohibited from using the paper shop because of the implication that the two women who manage it are lesbians. Mother's 'Old Flame' section in her photograph album includes a woman, Eddy's sister, and Miss Jewsbury hints that mother understands more than Jeanette realises (*O* 103). This is a not so subtle suggestion that mother, like Jeanette, Melanie, Katy and Miss Jewsbury, is at least conversant with lesbian experience.

In Adrienne Rich's 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' lesbianism is interpreted as the norm that is negated later in the child's life by the dominant discourse of heterosexuality. This strand of thought, of lesbianism as the norm, is evident in all of the intimations in *Oranges* that are made concerning the sexuality of the women in the community. Jeanette querulously holds on to the thread that leads through the maze of 'why do women marry men?' as a child and as an adult lesbian narrator. The normalising of lesbianism which Doan observes in *Oranges* and which Rich describes in 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' are connected. Rich's argument is persuasive:

If women are the earliest sources of emotional caring and physical nurture for both female and male children, it would seem logical, from a feminist perspective at least, to pose the following questions: whether the search for love and tenderness in both sexes does not originally lead to women; *why in fact women would ever redirect that search...* (217)

Rich's answer lies in the title of her essay, that is, that women redirect that search because of compulsory heterosexuality. Homosexuality is a dominant theme in *Oranges* and appears to illustrate the reasoning behind Rich's quotation. Lesbianism

as an original norm for women is embedded in the female community that surrounds Jeanette. It is only in the deferral to higher authorities, such as St. Paul, that this originality becomes something to be ashamed of. This deferral to St. Paul by the mother and daughter is also the position where the deconstruction of heterosexuality and homosexuality is halted, because the deferral of meaning stops in favour of deference to hierarchical thinking.

Bonnie Zimmerman in ‘What has Never Been’ warns the reader not to be totally seduced by Rich’s arguments because such an all-inclusive view of lesbianism is a weakened argument. Zimmerman reasons that this is because it blurs the distinctions “between lesbian relationships and non-lesbian female friends” and “between lesbian identity and female-centred identity” (184). For precision’s sake Rich’s thesis is disputable, but the quotation by her that is cited above is perhaps not intended to be descriptive or prescriptive. Margaret Reynolds’ Introduction to *The Penguin Book of Lesbian Short Stories* also cites this exact reference from ‘Compulsory Heterosexuality’ and uses it to demonstrate how Winterson’s story, ‘The Poetics of Sex’, differs from Beth Nugent’s ‘City of Boys’:

Beth Nugent’s seeking narrator in ‘City of Boys’ wants her lover to be her mother, but has fallen into the old trap of believing that this desire is proof of arrested sexual development. Jeanette Winterson’s characters, on the other hand, have no such worries. Baby, lover, mother all come together.

Nothing is prescribed. All is possible. (Reynolds xxxi)

‘The Poetics of Sex’ is constructed by intrusive, stereotypical questions that lesbians may be asked by ignorant, homophobic enquirers. In answer to the question “Were you Born a Lesbian?” the narrator also confounds the search for origins:

I am proud to be Picasso's lover in spite of the queer looks we get when holding hands on busy streets. 'Mummy, why is that man staring at us?' I said when only a month old. 'Don't worry dear, he can't help it, he's got something wrong with his eyes.' We need more Labradors. The world is full of blind people. They don't see Picasso and me dignified in our love.

They see perverts, inverters, tribades, homosexuals. (416)⁵

It is inviting to draw parallels between this short story, Rich's essay and *Oranges*, because they all reverse the standardised view of heterosexuality. (Incidentally, these parallels must also extend to the Picasso and Sappho who re-appear in *Art and Lies*.) These texts construct heterosexuality as secondary or perverse and undermine its hegemonic status. They imply that lesbianism is a norm as a reverse discourse in order to question the institutionalisation of homophobia. The historical double life of women that Rich refers to at the end of her essay is one that applies to Melanie, Jeanette's mother, Miss Jewsbury, Eddy's sister and Katy.

Palmer's *Contemporary Lesbian Writing* also emphasises the similarities between *Oranges* and Rich's essay but stresses that *Oranges* is more ambivalent in its depiction of the female community, because it allows for hate as well as love: "While the network of female relationships which comprise Jeanette's life recalls Rich's theory of a lesbian continuum, these relationships are not idealized or described uncritically" (103). Palmer's point holds true when disregarding *Oranges'* transcendent love for God, because at times it holds on to the pebble of ambivalence where love and hate are allowed to intermingle and the mother is criticised.

In the Introduction to the novel Winterson is adamant that it is both comforting and threatening. The following exemplifies the latter:

⁵ This is also included in Winterson's short story collection, *The World and Other Places*.

Oranges is a threatening novel. It exposes the sanctity of family life as something of a sham; it illustrates by example that what the church calls love is actually psychosis and it dares to suggest that what makes life difficult for homosexuals is not their perversity but other people's. (*O* xiii)

Winterson is disturbing the church's view of love and, by association, Jeanette's mother's bias. Jeanette's love for Melanie is described as happening accidentally, but is eventually regarded as love. The relationships between Jeanette and Melanie and Jeanette and Katy are portrayed as natural and it is the 'psychosis' of the others that is, in opposition, false and unnatural. The reader is shaped into understanding that Jeanette loves differently and that it is her love that is natural and not blameworthy.

Louise Horskjaer Humphries' agenda in 'Listening for the Author's Voice: "Unsexing" the Wintersonian Oeuvre' is based on analysing *Oranges* and *Written on the Body* away from a lesbian-feminist position. She begins by stating that Winterson is repeatedly identified as a writer who is concerned with sexual politics (3), and argues correctly that Winterson is largely viewed by secondary critics as a lesbian writer who either does or does not fulfil her authorial sexual role. Humphries pushes instead for Winterson to be read as a writer, rather than a lesbian writer. She disagrees with critics who read *Oranges*, "in terms of a distinct difference of concern with the rest of her oeuvre" (8). From Hinds' perspective Humphries could also be accused of 'de-centring' lesbian desire in *Oranges*, particularly with the following statement:

Admittedly, *Oranges* is at some level specifically about lesbian desire in a heterosexually dominated culture – here represented by the Church - and as such offers a challenge to patriarchal and heterosexist discourse. However, more than that, it is about the creation of a person (artist-

prophet) and love's role as a kind of catalyst in the quest for identity.

(Humphries 9)

Generally, I am in favour of Humphries' position, but I find that in this reference she is too restrictive in her interpretation of the novel. It tends to echo Winterson's voice in the Introduction to *Oranges* and this resemblance becomes heightened all the more when bearing Ruddick's following point in mind: "The minimization of birth is not only a masculine or misogynist fantasy. Some feminists have promulgated their own version of the distinction between merely physical procreativity and the worthier creations of artists and prophets" (193). Humphries has not minimised birth as such, but she does tend to reduce the passion of the novel, the irrational in Ruddick's terms, to the apparently worthier conceptualisation of the narrator-daughter as artist-prophet. Winterson partly conforms to Ruddick's concept of separating mothering from birth in order to talk about the artist, but the irrationality of love is never eroded. As cited earlier, the adult Jeanette intends to persist in her search for love in spite of the betrayals she has suffered. Her love for mother, God and Melanie, and the sense of betrayal, are intrinsic to *Oranges*.

If Winterson's oeuvre is read as one generic whole, it is possible to become irritated by critics who attempt to mould her and her later novels into a lesbian-feminist position. The issue of the gender-free narrator in *Written on the Body* is especially overlooked and disfigured by various critics. I share Humphries' irritation that even if this technique has been noted, often the narrator will still be read as female despite the novel's self-conscious playing with stereotypes of gender. *Oranges* is however specifically concerned with lesbian desire (as well as love for mother and God) as this is what proves the hypocrisy of Jeanette's church. It is a different novel from *Written on the Body*; each of the novels has different areas of concern. The role

of love, which Humphries cites above, is always present as a powerful force in Winterson's work and if Jeanette had fallen in love with a man *Oranges* would not be the novel it is. Laura Doan sums this up as such:

Jeanette's strength and the strength of this coming-of-age/coming-out novel, emerges from a profound and unshakeable conviction that her lesbianism is right and that any attempt to condemn or despise her – a celebrant of the most natural of passions – constitutes perversion. Winterson totally redefines normal and renders heterosexuality as unintelligible for Jeanette. (137)

The saliency of Humphries' argument lies in her refusal to be emotionally blackmailed into applying lesbian feminist criticism to Winterson's work when it is not applicable. My main issue with Humphries rests with her tendency to align *Oranges* with *Written on the Body*. *Written on the Body* clearly attempts to transcend stereotyped gendered readings whereas *Oranges* has other areas of interest. *Oranges* and *Written on the Body* both, however, declare that love is beyond deconstruction.

Humphries defends *Oranges* against Doan's accusation that the novel does not perform to Doan's standards of what she expects from a lesbian writer: "But can *Oranges* seriously be faulted for not complying with a lesbian political agenda, and is Winterson really engaged in a simple reversal of binaries?" (9). By loving the wrong sort of people Jeanette is forced into realising the narrowness of the love/hate divide, and Humphries interprets this as love, indirectly showing Jeanette that truth is provisional (10). Before Jeanette and Melanie's relationship is discovered Jeanette tells her that she loves her as much as the Lord (*O* 102). She also tells the pastor this when he is publicly denouncing their 'unnatural' passion. He says she cannot love the Lord if she loves Melanie and her reply is that she can do both, which reiterates the

destabilising title of the novel. Just as 'Deuteronomy' pushes for plural readings, Jeanette is preaching that there is more than one way of loving.

In 'Ruth' there are repeated quotations from 'Deuteronomy', such as, "time is a great deadener" (166). This appears for the second time when Jeanette declares how she feels for Melanie after meeting with her once again. By recycling lines from this specific chapter it is as though Jeanette is stressing this is only her view, only one version, but this is still painful. It also suggests that time and disappointment bring an altered perspective once love has faded: "... there are different kinds of infidelity, but betrayal is betrayal wherever you find it" (O 166).

In conclusion, *Oranges* asks for love to be regarded as capable of transcending barriers. Love is held up as a sign of hope in spite of betrayal and aggression. This is the subtext of the novel and is the message Winterson repeats in her later work. The unconditional love that Jeanette feels for God is the version that she desires. *Oranges* does not offer a simplification of love and betrayal. It insists on portraying the influences of the past as tangled constructs and fictions. Love is also worthy and desirable. The ramifications of the novel's insistence on love being transcendent are that even in the fantasy and dream sequences it is careful to remember the inescapability of binary thinking. This lack of freedom from the master/slave relationship is more pronounced when remembering that Jeanette never fully severs the thread that connects her to her mother. It is only in the heterosexual/homosexual binary that Winterson offers to deconstruct binary oppositions.

When mother says "oranges are not the only fruit" towards the end of the novel (ostensibly because she has a surfeit of pineapples), it is possible that she has moved towards relaxing her own strict dualistic view of the world (O 167). This incident occurs in the last chapter, 'Ruth', who is biblically famous for being home-sick and

also for her loyalty and love for her mother-in-law, Naomi. The story of Ruth and Naomi may be transposed on to mother and Jeanette as there is the hint that the mother is softening into thinking plurally. Her ironic C.B. moniker, 'Kindly Light', suggests, however, that one should be careful not to look too closely for a mother and daughter reconciliation. It is perhaps more valid to interpret this stage as one of *rapprochement*, where the child returns to mother for reassurance in order to go back out again into the world. Jeanette's reading matter on the journey home seals the *rapprochement*, because *Middlemarch* self-consciously advocates the influences of the past in that it belongs to the realist tradition.

In the next chapter of this thesis there is a more detailed examination of how disappointment in love is a pre-requisite for romantic love and of how love and passion can be both liberating and imprisoning in Winterson's writing. This second chapter is devoted to *The Passion*, but Winterson relies on suffering and the freedom to love as narrative devices in all of her main novels. In *Oranges* Jeanette has to be betrayed to become a romantic heroine. She is martyred by the treachery of those she loves. Her isolation and subsequent independence construct her into an individuated heroine. Her return to her family home at the end of the novel suggests, however, that the thread has not been completely severed. Her need for love makes her the weaker, dependent one in the power struggle with mother. This weakened role also validates her moral position within the binary of good versus evil. Jeanette's continuing love for God establishes how this heroine accepts love as transcendent, and therefore stays in the lower position in the hierarchy.

Chapter Two

Love, Testing the Limits of Freedom

The Passion

The freedom to love the person of one's choice, irrespective of gender or sexuality, is always one aspect of Winterson's brand of love. Her use of romantic love departs from the traditional heterosexual romance narrative. Homosexuality, in particular lesbianism, is included as 'natural' in Winterson's love stories. In tension with this desire for the freedom to love is the actuality of falling in love, where a self desires to merge with another. Consequently, the loss of self (and loss of freedom) is intrinsic to falling in love. Winterson breaks from the hegemony of heterosexual romances but her adoration of love stories suggests that freedom must only ever be limited.

The Passion recognises this contradiction of limited freedom more fully than *Oranges* with, for example, the physical imprisonment of Henri. His continuing love for his co-narrator, Villanelle, whilst in his cell re-enacts the loss of self which comes with being imprisoned and with falling in love. His faith in love remains undiminished and as can be seen in the following quotation, which Henri narrates, he is also a means for vocalising the redemptive aspect of love that surfaces in all of Winterson's work: "Love, they say, enslaves and passion is a demon and many have been lost for love. I know this is true, but I know too that without love we grope the tunnels of our lives and never see the sun" (P 154).

The limitations of freedom, which arise with romantic love, are also found in the tension between fiction and the 'fact' of subject status. *The Passion* depends upon the quotation, "I'm telling you stories", and develops *Oranges'* interest in how love is a construct, rather than a biologically essential fact. Anthony Giddens' definition of romantic love in *The Transformations of Intimacy* augments an understanding of *The*

Passion's realisation of the liaison between fiction and love: "Romantic love introduced the idea of a narrative into an individual's life – a formula which radically extended the reflexivity of sublime love" (39). He continues: "The telling of a story is one of the meanings of 'romance', but this story now becomes individualised, inserting self and other into a personal narrative which had no particular reference to wider social processes" (39). There is, then, a dichotomy that is central to Giddens', and Winterson's, interpretation of romantic love. It is necessarily a construct that is formed by the telling of stories, but it also requires a belief in the subject status of individuals. To incur a loss of self, a belief in the individual is taken for granted to some extent. There is the freedom from essentialism in the discursive aspect of romantic love, but in its need for individuals there is a continued dependency on the illusion, or delusion, of a unified self. From a poststructuralist perspective the restrictions of humanist thinking are still in place as Winterson chooses to rely on the theme of love. The graphic image of groping 'the tunnels of our lives' when there is an absence of love stresses that lives are restricted without it. The image may be read as coming close to essentialising love within the humanist tradition.

In *Desire*, Catherine Belsey asks, "is desire a matter of fact or fiction?" (78), and views Villanelle as offering a more overtly fictionalised account of desire in comparison with Henri: "...Henri sees the real effects of romance he has subscribed to, and returns in consequence to the realm of the Law. But the story of Villanelle, the novel's cross-dressed, bisexual, web-footed heroine, is altogether less conventional" (78). Belsey also notes how, at the end of the novel, Henri believes that he has separated fact from fiction, and reality from invention. This is when he differentiates his love for Napoleon, which was invention, from Villanelle's, which he believes to be 'true'. Belsey cites the following quotation from *The Passion* in support of this

claim: “My passion for her, even though she could never return it, showed me the difference between inventing a lover and falling in love” (P 158).¹ Belsey disputes Henri’s distinction between the two and reminds the reader that Henri’s word is not entirely trustworthy. This is highlighted when Henri asks the readers to trust him, ironically highlighting how stories can never be entirely truthful. Belsey deconstructs Henri’s love for Villanelle in the light of his unreliability: “This sounds eminently familiar, plausible. The advice in women’s magazines would say much the same. This is how you recognize the real thing. But at this moment Henri is mad, alone, imprisoned on a rock, exactly like Napoleon...” (80).

The tone of *The Passion* suggests that Henri’s love for Villanelle is essentially romantic love because of the desire to merge with another, Villanelle. To imply that this desire for theoretical if not physical unification is just a part of his insanity (as Belsey does) overlooks the overall compulsion in the novel that insists on falling in love with love. This insistence is balanced somewhat by both of the narrators’ awareness that falling in love is comparable to gambling with one’s freedom. Love is depicted as bittersweet because of this gambling metaphor and it is ultimately considered to be vital for existence. Love conclusively escapes the irony of unreliable narration because it is repeatedly esteemed as transcendent despite the associations with gambling and with being a fiction. The invocation of love as surpassing categorisation by Henri and Villanelle, and other Winterson narrators, suggests that love is not just being parodied for the purposes of postmodernist techniques. Love is also a Wintersonian touchstone for emotions that are presented as timeless.

By depicting love as timeless and transcendent it is constructed as having the value of religion. When Winterson appears to essentialise love she develops the equation of

¹ Belsey refers to this quotation in *Desire* on page 79.

love equalling a faith. Giddens outlines the association between romantic love and God and this is particularly useful when analysing Winterson's oeuvre as she consistently depends on love and the love of God as inspirational frameworks for her novels. Giddens' historical explanation of the connection between these two types of love helps to explain why Winterson, who is a self-consciously well-read writer of love stories, is attracted to themes of courtly and romantic love:

Specific to Europe was the emergence of ideals of love closely connected to the moral values of Christianity. The precept that one should devote oneself to God in order to know him, and that through this process self-knowledge is achieved, became part of a mystical unity between man and woman. (39)

The spiritual value of love, which is inherited from an historical love of God, is used by Winterson as a means to valorise the love stories as being beyond human dimensions. This affiliation between the love of God and earthly love is evident in *Oranges* where Jeanette has God for an 'emotional role model'. This role model continues to be used in these later novels.

The very title, *The Passion*, constantly refers to not only another story of "the sexual/erotic compulsions of passionate love" (Giddens 40), but also to Christianity. Christ's suffering is one of the defining features of this novel's title. The Passion in relation to Christ is described in *The Interpreter's Dictionary* as having no exact definition, but, "it is variously used to refer to the suffering of Jesus, to his crucifixion or death..." (663). The definition goes on to clarify that the term Passion is most apt in reference to the last two days of Christ's life (663). Suffering, in this context, is a necessity and sharing in Christ's pain allows for joy for others. *The Passion* embraces this loving in suffering as its two narrators are depicted as desperately unhappy in

never holding on to their objects of desire. Frye's codification of the typical victim, the pharmakos or scapegoat, enables a reading that unites Henri with Christian passion: "The archetype of the incongruously ironic is Christ, the perfectly innocent victim excluded from human society" (42). With Frye's definition Henri is the ironic victim, even though he commits the murder he is accused of, because within the plot he is the innocent who suffers for the sins of others.

Giddens asks for passion and romantic love to be seen separately and understands passion as, "a more or less universal phenomenon" (38). He separates passion from romantic love for the purpose of historical accuracy, and argues that the secular use of passion is relatively modern. Winterson tends to disregard these obstacles of differentiation and draws on the secular, Christian and romantic tradition for her own discourse. This discourse finds its voice in the ambivalence of passion, where love alternates between being liberating and confining, as with Henri's prison cell. Henri's insanity is the perfect trope for positing this dual perspective of love. When passion stops being ambivalent in *The Passion* it turns into obsession and this becomes the moral subtext as the novel warns against passion departing from ambivalence to become fixed, destructive, obsession. Courtly love, romantic love, passion and obsession are the different forms of love that are used in this novel. Courtly love is understood in this thesis as the early forerunner to romantic love, in its twin devotion to another and to obstacles, which stop the lovers uniting. Winterson tends to merge courtly and romantic love in *The Passion* in order to emphasise the sadness that arises when these obstacles to unification are not overcome.

Before looking at the limits of freedom and love in *The Passion* in greater detail, it must also be remembered that, paradoxically, love is also allowed to offer unconditional freedom at times. The closest Winterson comes to stylising love as

potentially liberating is when her novels breach the traditional heterosexual boundary to tell love stories across the spectrum of human sexuality. It is also here that the concepts of a humanist self and essential subject status are no longer restricting because the marginalised lesbian subject has traditionally been denied any status. The essential self that poststructuralist theory has eroded has not historically been awarded whenever homosexuality has been disregarded as invisible or abnormal. *The Passion* inherits the wish for the freedom to love from *Oranges*, where Jeanette realises that the reason why her mother wants her to leave home is because she loved, “the wrong sort of people” (O 125). Jeanette clarifies this by explaining her mother’s and the wider community’s philosophy: “Right sort of people in every respect except this one; romantic love for another woman was a sin” (O 125). When reading *The Passion* in relation to *Oranges* the normalising of homosexuality, which has been traced in *Oranges* in the previous chapter of this thesis, is recouped in *The Passion* to the extent that heterosexual and homosexual romantic loves are treated as inclusive thematic concerns. *Oranges* constantly defends and accounts for love outside heterosexuality. *The Passion* supports this stance by continuing to assume tacitly that love and sexuality should not be considered naturally restrictive or biologically fixed. *The Passion* continues where *Oranges* ends in its deification of love.

Lisa Moore’s ‘Teledildonics: Virtual Lesbians in the Fiction of Jeanette Winterson’ claims that Winterson barely touches on the issue of homophobia after *Oranges* and goes as far as to state that Winterson’s novels “may be read politically, but they themselves make no explicit political argument” (113). In Moore’s favour it may be argued that romantic love depends on two individuals’ absorption with each other, both of whom forget the outside world of politics and marginality. Moore is, however, overlooking how reading is a political act, and that a text is necessarily open

to various subjective approaches. Paulina Palmer also disputes Moore's remark and argues that the reason Villanelle stops meeting with her lover is because the Queen of Spades is married:

A particularly moving incident, one which depicts the position of the lesbian in hetero-patriarchy as 'problematic' in the extreme, is the episode in which Villanelle, positioned in the marginal role of outsider and voyeur, to which throughout history the lesbian has generally been relegated, gazes through the window of the Queen of Spades' villa and watches her conversing with her husband in the social and financial security of the family home. (105)²

Within the context of the novel Villanelle is also the 'outsider' as the lover and as the temporary object of desire. The Queen becomes the one in control as Villanelle waits outside and the literal loss of Villanelle's heart to her lover implies that this is a novel about the power of passion, as well as one which encompasses the historical marginalisation of homosexuality. Moore's interpretation overlooks Winterson's project that begins in *Oranges*, which challenges homophobia. Winterson normalises what has previously been perceived as abnormal in dominant discourses, in a style that is confident in embracing English literary history.

When Villanelle notices the Queen of Spades' intimacy with her husband, Villanelle is also threatened by the obstacle of stability in the other's relationship: "They did not live in the fiery furnace she and I inhabited, but they had a calm and a way that put a knife to my heart" (*P* 75). Whilst still in agreement with Palmer's reading of this intimacy, which places Villanelle as a lesbian outside the frame and outside history, this instance must also be interpreted as an admission by Villanelle

² In '*The Passion: Storytelling, Fantasy, Desire*'

that pleasure and love are possible without passion. Passion's hierarchical status as the strongest emotion, in relation to Christ or the novel, has momentarily become a falsity. Villanelle is afraid that the initial excitement of falling in love has been superseded by being in love. The Queen and her husband have survived passion and are still intimate and this is the stage that both Henri and Villanelle never manage to attain with their beloveds. Searching for love is elemental to *The Passion*. This becomes overt in its allusions to courtly love and with the theme of the quest. The two narrators unite in their separate glorifications of the search for love.³

The Passion demands the freedom to love and simultaneously thrives on recounting the restrictions that stop a relationship from forming. Stevi Jackson, in 'Women and Heterosexual Love', explains how loving can never be carefree as it is understood in Western thinking as such: "Although love relationships are often seen as egalitarian, the compulsiveness and insecurity of romantic passion implies a struggle for power. To be in love is to be powerless, at the mercy of the other, but it also holds out the promise of power, of enslaving the other in the bonds of love" (53).⁴ By default, Jackson is comparing passion in romantic love to a game where there will always be winners and losers, which is central to Villanelle's philosophy. Jessica Benjamin's *The Bonds of Love* argues a parallel point, in that Western love rests on oppositionary thinking. With binary thinking there are always winners and losers because of the imposed hierarchy that is implicit in the binary. In the previous chapter I argue that Jeanette cannot escape the binary thinking that is imposed on her, even though she eventually manages to separate herself geographically from her

³ The search for love is examined in chapters six and seven of this thesis, in relation to *Gut Symmetries* and *The Powerbook* respectively.

⁴ Further to this, Jackson suggests that because love offers a chance of domination this may be what attracts women to romantic fiction and to the idealisation of love. This point becomes overt in *Gut Symmetries* and in particular in Alice's early dreams of romantic love with Jove.

mother. *The Passion* also ruminates over the impossibility of distancing oneself from the master-slave domination that is intrinsic to Western loving. This is specifically noticeable in Villanelle's passion for risks and when understanding Henri's imprisonment as a trope for falling in love. Winterson uses courtly love, passion and obsession to amplify the power relations involved in a love story.

De Rougemont's definition of passion in *Love in the Western World* describes a prevalent concern in Winterson's work: "What stirs lyrical poets to their finest flights is neither the delight of the senses nor the fruitful contentment of the settled couple; not the satisfaction of love, but its *passion*. And passion means suffering" (15). De Rougemont's understanding of literary passion resembles Winterson's use of it in her work. She identifies how love in literature is historically constantly obstructed and becomes more alluring than a text that permits the lovers to unite finally. Her heroes and heroines yearn for this unification, but are constantly denied it. Because of its title *The Passion* is most obviously the text that realises how suffering is intrinsic to a successful piece of fiction, perhaps the 'finest flight' according to de Rougemont's argument: "Happy love has no history. Romance only comes into existence where love is fatal, frowned upon and doomed by life itself" (5). Winterson's novels appear to be assured a place in history by de Rougemont's reasoning and *The Passion* is promised a provisional one by Harold Bloom in *The Western Canon*, where he lists his suggested future canon. He does, however, offer a qualification: "I am not so confident about this list as the first three. Cultural prophecy is always a mug's game".⁵

The myth of Tristan and Iseult is de Rougemont's template for enduring success and *The Passion* belongs to this tradition that refuses the closure of 'happy ever after'

⁵This is taken from Appendix D of *The Western Canon*. There are no page numbers available for referencing.

despite idealising the promise of unifying lovers. *The Passion* is a late-twentieth-century text, set in the time of the Napoleonic wars and is underpinned by the history of the Romance. This is evident in its inclusion of the stories of the Round Table and the use of obstacles as a means to propel the narrative. It also develops *Oranges'* concern with the righteous hero/heroine where Sir Perceval is another version of Jeanette. *The Passion* merges the secular with religiosity and this heightens the worthiness of love, in all its different manifestations, as another god and another object of desire.

Courtly and Romantic Love

Courtly love thrives on obstacles and is the early predecessor of romantic love. *The Passion* uses these historical, literary forms of love to emphasise the obedience of the lovers. The use of courtly love is particularly noticeable in the alignments of *The Passion's* characters with knights and Queens of chivalry and is thus defined in *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*:

Its relation of lover to adored lady is modelled on the dependence of feudal follower on his lord; the love itself was a religious passion, ennobling, ever unfulfilled, and ever increasing. The common (though not universal) requirement of non-fulfilment meant that the love was usually premarital or extra-marital. (238)⁶

This 'feudal following' is inscribed in Henri's obedient love for Villanelle. His behaviour is often symptomatic of a courtly lover, as is Villanelle's towards the Queen of Spades. His loyalty to Villanelle is comparable to Andreas' codes in *De Amores*: "The true lover would choose to be stripped of all his riches, to be utterly

⁶ This text can be found under the editor's name (Margaret Drabble) in the bibliography.

deprived of all that the human mind can visualise for living, rather than forgo the love he anticipates he has won” (37).⁷ Andreas’ ideal lover, before reneging on his codes in Book Three, is prepared to sacrifice his (and her) all for the one who is worshipped. The sacrificial value that love is endowed with in *The Passion* persuades Henri to follow Napoleon and Villanelle and keeps Villanelle waiting outside her Queen’s home.

Elizabeth Grosz, in *Jacques Lacan: An Introduction*, realises the phallogentricity implicit in this specific type of love that relies on obstructions: “The obstacle to love, so central to chivalric forms of love, is not external. It is the internal condition of human subjectivity and sexuality, constituted as they are by a rift governed by the Other. Courtly love is a masculine way of refusing to recognize this fundamental rupture” (137). It may be argued, then, that courtly love naturalises the use of obstacles and feeds off the ‘normality’ of having barriers in the way, just as *The Passion* relies on the ‘fundamental rupture’ that Grosz outlines between would-be lovers. By using aspects of courtly love Winterson refuses to liberate her lovers. Their freedom is restricted by the act of loving because this can never unite the lovers even though it promises to do so.

In *The Allegory of Love*, C. S. Lewis expands upon Guinevere’s disappointment and rejection of Lancelot, and therefore on the rupture between this pairing. The following refers to Chrétien de Troyes’ version and the key word in relation to *The Passion* is ‘lukewarm’:

The Queen has heard of his momentary hesitation in stepping on to the tumbril, and this lukewarmness in the service of love has been held by her sufficient to annihilate all the merit of his subsequent labours and

⁷ This is referenced in the bibliography as *Andreas Capellanus on Love* by P.G. Walsh.

humiliations. Even when he is forgiven, his trials are not yet at an end
(Lewis 328).

Lancelot has lost his heart to his Queen, and this occurs literally for Villanelle after falling in love with the Queen of Spades. Henri figuratively loses his heart first to Napoleon and then to Villanelle. Both of the narrators become chivalric knights, who surrender their will to their objects of desire in the tradition of courtly love. The ‘lukewarmness’ that Guinevere believes Lancelot displays is a by-word for all that Henri is escaping from when he leaves his village to pursue Napoleon: “We’re a lukewarm people for all our feast days and hard work. Not much touches us, but we long to be touched. We lie awake at night willing the darkness to part and show us a vision” (*P* 7). Henri is not only characterised by his desire for passion, but also by his inability to escape the lukewarm and by his faithfulness in his role of a knight. The hesitation that he exhibits in Venice also emphasises his position as Villanelle’s courtly lover. He gets lost for five days, afraid to ask for directions: he is unable to row the gondola in the way that Villanelle shows him, he hesitates.

Henri’s love for love continues whilst in his cell. Once on the rock, in the asylum San Servolo, he exists in the past as he retreats from passion back to the safety of the cell.⁸ Apart from the company of ghosts from his past he is isolated, similarly to Jeanette in *Oranges* after her excommunication. He continues, nevertheless, to romanticise the dream of reciprocal love: “We are a lukewarm people and our longing for freedom is our longing for love. If we had the courage to love we would not so value these acts of war” (*P* 154). This idealisation of not being lukewarm is corroborated by the New Testament. The Book of Revelations holds as much distaste for mediocrity as Henri and vindicates his earlier yearning for passion when joining

⁸ The correct spelling is San Servelo, but to avoid confusion the version found in *The Passion* is replicated here.

the army: "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So because you are lukewarm - neither hot nor cold - I am about to spit you out of my mouth" (Revelations 3:14). Henri's desire for love and passion is, then, supported by Christianity, as though this validates his existence. Love, it appears, is life-affirming, despite his environs and erased future. Love is described as sufficient.

Prior to Henri bemoaning that his fellow men do not have the courage to love, he voices an allegiance to the knights of the Round Table, as opposed to the brutality of Napoleon's tactics: "Bonaparte taught us that freedom lay in our fighting arm, but in the legends of the Holy Grail no one won it by force. It was Perceval, the gentle knight, who came to a ruined chapel and found what others had overlooked, simply by sitting still" (*P* 154). Henri understands that "being able to love" is a type of freedom, which does not come with power or wealth (*P* 154). Again, this belief in freedom in love is not necessarily a sign of his madness. It is instead a signifier of how contradictory love is in Western thinking and in Winterson's writing.

The instructions that Villanelle gives Henri to find her heart depend on him not looking in the obvious places and so he, like Jeanette in *Oranges*, is constructed as the 'gentle knight'. His characterisation signals how the wish to find more excitement is equivocal and can lead to love or war. War is understood as the people's less courageous but more popular option. As well as *The Passion's* foundations resting on Romance it is also an anti-war novel disguised as another love story. It honours the Holy Grail legend as a search for love, but does so without paying homage to violence or colonisation. *The Passion* is faithful to traditional values of masculinity when using Grosz's interpretation of courtly love, but it also disputes these values when it questions masculinity's attachment to warfare.

Jeanette's willingness to continue searching for love in spite of betrayals embodies hope, as does Henri's allegiance to the freedom of love whilst imprisoned. Villanelle's rival in love, the Queen of Spades' husband, embodies the antithesis of this hopefulness. His search for the Grail emblematises his acquisitiveness rather than his role as a gentle knight. This rival is comparable to Elgin of *Written on the Body* and Jove of *Gut Symmetries*, because he is a caricature of masculinity. His search in this context consequently becomes an ironic look at masculinity rather than suggesting he is 'pure' enough to be granted it. As Henri points out, the Grail cannot be granted simply by searching for it; Sir Perceval found it "simply by sitting still" (*P* 154). The rival's presumptive journey suggests that he will discover it by virtue of his will. Northrop Frye understands the Holy Grail as having a connection with Christian Eucharistic symbolism and as descended from the "miraculous food-provider" (194). Winterson uses the Grail as an ambiguous motif for discussing the quest, and for ruminating over how this can be ethical, or Christian, when it is for a love that allows for reciprocity according to Henri's belief system. The Grail and the quest are repeated Wintersonian metaphors. They occur in *Oranges* with Sir Perceval's presence, fleetingly in *Gut Symmetries*, and in greater detail in *The Powerbook*. The quest's negative associations with colonising, and searching for purely selfish reasons, is characterised by the Queen of Spades' husband, whereas *The Powerbook* ruminates sympathetically over Lancelot's inability to see it. By sympathising with Lancelot, *The Powerbook* re-examines the lure of the search in relation to a spurned lover.

When Henri's narration is read as an anti-war text that cross-examines masculinity it exposes the susceptibility of the crowd to the tyrant. Napoleon's passion for conquest is shared by a nation:

He believed he was the centre of the world and for a long time there was nothing to change him from this belief. Not even John Bull. He was in love with himself and France joined in. It was a romance. Perhaps all romance is like that; not a contract between equal parties but an explosion of dreams and desires that can find no outlet in everyday life. (*P* 13)

Napoleon's faults are supported by the willingness of his followers to commit acts of violence rather than love others. Henri appears to be yearning nostalgically for a (mythical) time when the Holy Grail was considered an object of desire, rather than the warlord Napoleon. The 'romance' that Napoleon enters into with France explains the link between passion, which is included in romance, and despotism. With the invocation of courtly love and its accoutrements the novel subjectively frames Henri as one who permits the tyrant to be the master in the master/slave relationship. The obedient, courtly lover is at once positioning him or herself as the lower one in the hierarchy. By over-valuing love, the lover is inadvertently giving the beloved, Napoleon in this case, the freedom to dominate. This romance between despot and subject is "not a contract between equal parties" (*P* 13), but romantic love is necessarily always dependent on the shifting power relations between the two.

Henri's diary is the basis of his narration and is comparable to the twelfth-century writings that look to myths to idolise love in the vein that Belsey describes: "Rewriting the Celtic legends of a magical and heroic Arthurian world, the twelfth-century texts defined a passion which involved a constant commitment and the highest degree of intensity, but which was not yet moralized, domesticated, institutional" (97). This account concurs with *The Passion* in its refusal of the codes of both marriage and army life when it traces

the deserters' journey from Moscow to Venice, and in the story of Villanelle's nine-day affair with the Queen of Spades. The trek across Europe is an escape from Napoleon's madness. It is also a metaphor for finding freedom outside of the Victorian sanitisation that later re-classified the twelfth-century Romances that Henri aspires to. Belsey reiterates the sexual and adulterous aspects of courtly and romantic love that have more recently been excluded from the originals:

Since the nineteenth century, and in particular since C. S. Lewis showed the Anglican and humanist romance of marriage triumphant over medieval extra-marital passion, scholars have been busy defending their author-heroes against the charge that they endorse adultery. Not much can be done with the troubadours, perhaps, but Marie de France and Chretien have both been read as proto-Victorian novelists, solemnly proclaiming the redemptive virtue of true love duly located within monogamous marriage. (97)

Adultery is focused on more strongly in later Winterson novels, beginning with *Written on the Body* and its diatribe against marriage, and is discussed in greater detail in this thesis with reference to *Gut Symmetries*. In *The Passion* adultery is a secondary concern in comparison to the disappointment of lovers. Villanelle and Henri are at times chivalric knights who offer love despite the likelihood of ever overcoming the obstacles that are a traditional pre-requisite of courtly and romantic love. Villanelle's obstacle is marriage and, as Palmer argues, the unacceptability of homosexuality. Her lover's husband obstructs by his presence and absence. For Henri the obstacle is lack of reciprocity from Napoleon and Villanelle.

When Villanelle becomes Henri's Queen, as his unattainable object of desire, she becomes a less sympathetic figure than many critics of *The Passion* allow for. Just as Guinevere despises Lancelot's hesitation, Villanelle also refuses to treat others with reciprocal concern. A justification for this view comes when she is unwilling to blame herself for Henri's downfall: "He wouldn't let me comfort him and we never made love again. Not my doing" (P 148). By saying 'not my doing' Villanelle not only turns away from Henri but also forgets her complicity in his coming to Venice. Her retreat from passion at the end of the novel, and from her own object of desire, is also a parallel to Guinevere's retreat to a convent.

Henri and Villanelle and the Queen of Spades can never avoid suffering because this is a novel about passion, but it is Henri's isolation rather than Villanelle's that creates the greatest poignancy of this Romance: "I had run away with her before, come as an exile to her home and stayed for love. Fools stay for love. I am a fool. I stayed in the army eight years because I loved someone. You'd think that would have been enough" (P 152). Henri's physical imprisonment, which is dependent on his mental imprisonment, mirrors his loss of freedom that has come about with his love for Villanelle.

In the interview with *The Paris Review* Winterson clarifies her love for the heroic figure in her writing: "My characters all have something of the hero archetype about them in that they are largely stripped of context" (74). Henri is the hero who sets out on a quest, as Jeanette does before him in *Oranges*, and Jordan does after him in *Sexing the Cherry*. Henri is the archetype and a knight-errant as he follows Napoleon. His loyalty and the theme of searching are both repeated when Henri is in Venice and is looking for and finds Villanelle's heart in the Queen of Spades' house. Villanelle advises him that it will be in the place he does not expect, as though her heart is the

Grail. Henri finds it, which confirms his status as pure. As a hero his gallantry and obedience are praised and his heroism is not confined to helping Villanelle. His worshipping of love in its different forms is what makes him a typically Wintersonian device for heroism. By using a recognisably heroic figure as a vehicle to praise love, love is maintained as the pure, transcendental object of desire. As with Jeanette and Jordan, Henri is characterised as blameless and, consequently, when he praises love, love becomes the Grail. He is pure enough to find it metaphorically, as he retrieves Villanelle's heart. Winterson's love for the heroic figure is fitting because the hero is her means to transform love from being ordinary to being transcendent.

The Paradox of Passion

Winterson's use of passion, in comparison to courtly love, challenges the obstacles that are in place for the obedient lover. She layers passion over the allusions to courtly love as a form of relative freedom. The contradiction of passion is summarised by Villanelle's view of the Rialto Bridge, which divides and unites two sides of the city and may be drawn up to stop a war. As a 'half bridge' it is functional for war and peace, as well as being a meeting place for lovers. As with passion the bridge is both cruel and kind, but Villanelle recognises that the bridge and paradox are necessary: "They'll seal it eventually and we'll be brothers and mothers. But that will be the doom of paradox. Bridges join but they also separate" (*P* 61). Perhaps this is why passion and love are so dearly sought after by the characters. These emotions open all the senses to change and difference, even though there are risks involved: "For lovers, a bridge is a possibility, a metaphor of their chances" (*P* 57).

The Passion's emphasis on connecting passion to the city is re-appropriated in the mapping of the body, which implies that passion rebounds through every cell. This is

also where the heart is sentimentally central. Villanelle's separated heart is used in its dismembered state as a metonymic device for lost love. This theme of dismemberment precedes *Written on the Body's* taxonomy of the body and is performed more subtly in *The Passion*. The proximity of love and passion to the body is inherent in both novels and in *The Passion* the eye, the feet, the hands and the heart act as an irregular heart beat throughout the narrative. Occasionally the parts are brought into the foreground of the novel, as in Henri's search for Villanelle's heart in the Queen of Spades' house, and Henri's loss of an eye shortly before he loses his passion for Napoleon. The fragmented body parts influence the text's message of how deep passion may lie. Purinton argues that passion also infiltrates the cityscape and also connects Winterson's writing to various periods in literary history:

Passion is the conceptual and narrative bridge, the bridge between the bodies of Henri and Villanelle and the bridge between their texts, their histories, their stories. At a metafictional level, these various bridges extend between historically specific Romanticism and conceptually constructed Romanticism, between the early nineteenth century and the postmodern period. (74)

Passion operates in the novel as an unstable force that is outside the limitations of control. This insinuation of freedom is reinforced yet paradoxically diminished by the narrators' insistence that passion is destiny. A fatalistic account of love also makes it a prison because it suggests that it is impossible to escape from. Fatalism operates as a double bind in that it inspires the idea of freedom whilst also claiming that one's life and one's relationships have already been decided. This paradox of passion is observable in Henri's rationale for joining the army, which is a moveable prison. His desire was to find excitement and consequently passion: "Wherever love is, I want to

be, I will follow it as surely as the land-locked salmon finds the sea” (P 44). By figuratively comparing himself to a salmon finding the sea his actions are revealed to be unavoidable. His instinct for finding love is more powerful than reason.

Villanelle’s sentiment after falling in love with the Queen of Spades correlates with Henri’s desire for ‘the sea’: “Passion is not so much an emotion as a destiny” (P 62). She continues: “What choice have I in the face of this wind but to put up sail and rest my oars?” (P 62). Villanelle’s version of passion as destiny is an acceptance that it has to be succumbed to. Its comparison to a wind circuitously reminds the reader of Domino’s description of Napoleon: “Domino the midget says that being near him is like having a great wind rush about your ears. He says that’s how Madame de Stael put it and she’s famous enough to be right” (P 8). The understanding that passion is all-powerful is personified by Napoleon; it is also how de Rougemont perceives it:

Passion means suffering, something undergone, the mastery of fate over a free and responsible person. To love more than the object of love, to love passion for its own sake, has been to love to suffer and court suffering all the way from Augustine’s *amabim amare* down to modern romanticism. (50)

Once more, Winterson’s writing conforms to de Rougemont’s understanding of love in literature. De Rougemont’s recognition of the tradition of literary suffering also feeds into Purinton’s specific quotation about *The Passion*, as both are as aware as Winterson of the tradition of unhappy love in literature.

Henri’s rite of passage begins in Boulogne, where he is blinded by his passion. Villanelle explains his love for Napoleon as elemental to his youthfulness and lack of experience: “I have heard that when a duckling opens its eyes it will attach itself to whatever it first sees, duck or not. So it is with Henri, he opened his eyes and there

was Bonaparte” (P 147). By this reasoning Henri has been compelled by an innate drive or urge. He has apparently fallen in love with no surrounding discourses to encourage him, which is an extrapolation of Winterson’s previously cited view that her heroes are ‘largely stripped of context’. He opened his eyes and there was Bonaparte. This repetition of the idea of pre-destination raises the question of whether love is essential for Winterson. It certainly is for Villanelle as she explains her passion for her Queen and why she finally has to keep away from her lover: “Passion will not be commanded. It is no genie to grant us three wishes when we let it loose. It commands us and very rarely in the way we would choose” (P 144).

The material problem with essentialising love is put forward by Stevi Jackson in ‘Women and Heterosexual Love’: “Indeed I think it is vitally important that as feminists we should contest ideological constructions of love which represent it as ‘natural’” (51). Jackson’s reasoning depends on thinking of love as a construct rather than innate: “Emotions should not be regarded as pre-social essences, but as socially ordered and linguistically mediated” (51). This discursive view of love contains its own logic in poststructuralist thought, but in *The Passion* Villanelle favours a more pragmatic outlook that does not realise the cultural variability of passion that Jackson is aware of. Love’s obstacles are taken for granted in *The Passion* rather than analysed. In tension with this, though, is the narrators’ version of passion that is aware of the influence of discourses on shaping reactions and emotions, as when Henri demands that the readers trust him, he’s telling stories. This returns us to Giddens’ definition of romantic love as an insertion into a narrative and to Jackson’s discourse theory where love is a construct.

The intertextual awareness of *The Passion*, for example in its allusions to *The Odyssey*, suggests that for Henri generic desire has already been constructed before

meeting Villanelle. This contrasts with the claims in the novel that passion and love are pre-destined. Henri speaks of the lies that the soldiers tell themselves to survive the war, and these are another example of the novel's awareness of how language constructs reality, as "home became the focus of joy and sense", even though it was also the place for quarrels (*P* 83). In addition to this Henri recognises the lies behind this dream that kept the soldiers alive: "And the heaviest lie? That we could go home and pick up where we had left off. That our hearts would be waiting behind the door with the dog. Not all men are as fortunate as Ulysses" (*P* 83). The quest begins to turn sour as survival becomes more important than desire and Henri becomes the antithesis of Ulysses/Odysseus, because he never reaches home. The phrase 'home is where the heart is' could be the most comforting lie available to Henri and is a version of truth when considering that surviving war entails giving up the quest and the possibility of passion.

Stevi Jackson's argument that emotions are culturally constructed is demonstrable in Henri's reference to *The Odyssey* to explain his and the other soldiers' predicament. Jackson's suggestion that discourses create love is worth extending at this point as it is relevant to the stories that Henri and Villanelle tell: "We create for ourselves a sense of what our emotions are, of what being in love is, through positioning ourselves within discourses, constructing narratives of self, drawing on whatever cultural resources are available to us" ('Women' 58). This is also implied by Belsey when she compares Henri's version of true love to women's magazines, and by Henri's naïve view that true love is possible. This relative understanding of love complements the novel as a whole as well, in that it relies on Romance narratives to tell its story. The alternation between suggesting that love is inevitable, and yet a fiction, typifies the paradox of Winterson's passion. There is the paradox in her work

that deconstructs the hierarchy of whom one should and should not love, yet still maintains the myth of transcendence in affirming continuously that love in all its variations should be sought after. This paradox is enhanced when recognising that Winterson suggests simultaneously that love is fictional and innate. This may be understood as confusion on Winterson's part, but it is actually an attempt to maintain the paradox that holds on to the myth of transcendence whilst ethically questioning dominant ideologies that refuse to accept homosexual love. However, by adhering to transcendence (even as a contradictory measure) Winterson permits the continuance of hierarchical thinking. This, in turn, overrides the aspect of her writing that calls for equality.

The Passion creates diversions from the constraints of heterosexual romantic fiction, as with the affair between the Queen of Spades and Villanelle, but it still depends on the familiar model of the literary romance. As Jackson argues, this model is difficult to escape from: "Romantic ideals can be deeply embedded in our subjectivities even when we are critical of them" ('Women' 56). These ideals are intrinsic to Jeanette's difficulty in separating herself from her mother in *Oranges* and elemental to Henri's and Villanelle's attachment to Others. With the concept of passion Winterson swings ambivalently between essentialising love in the form of twentieth-century romantic fiction, and being aware of poststructuralist theory where everything, including love and passion, is a construct.

The Passion's predecessors, *Oranges* and *Boating for Beginners*, realise explicitly how modern romantic ideals have had an impact on late-twentieth-century Western concepts of love. The following is taken from the passage in *Oranges* that asks for 'original' love to be remembered:

Romantic love has been diluted into paperback form and has sold thousands and millions of copies. Somewhere it is still in the original, written on the tablets of stone. I would cross seas and suffer sunstroke and give away all I have, but not for a man, because they want to be the destroyer and never be destroyed. That is why they are unfit for romantic love. There are exceptions and I hope they are very happy. (*O* 165)

Perhaps Henri is one of Winterson's exceptions. He has been searching for the tablets of stone, just as Jeanette does before him, and is a continuation of this earlier heroic figure.

Lynne Pearce's "Written on Tablets of Stone?" uses the above quotation from *Oranges* for its title and demands that Winterson's work be understood as offering more than a universalising of love:

By attending to the 'universalising' discourses in Winterson's work the (heterosexual) 'general' reader can, of course, see the texts as transcending the particulars of sexual orientation; regard the fact that s/he is reading about lovers of the same sex as incidental and, consequently, a-political. Indeed, the fact that in her later fiction Winterson has shown many different combinations of love-relationship (homosexual and heterosexual) has, perhaps, contributed to the reader's impression of (great) 'Love' as being transcendent of history, culture, and gender. Yet to read the novels in this way is, I propose, to be blind to the angst at their (romantic) heart. For these are texts in which the desire to believe that somewhere, Romantic love is 'still in the original, written on tablets of stone' is constantly undercut by the 'Gross Reality' (*Boating* 25) of the

historical moment in which age, class, gender – and, not least, sexual orientation – matter desperately. (148)

Pearce argues that Winterson rewrites rather than erases romantic love and points out that there is an ambivalent tension between Winterson's universal 'love' and 'Gross Reality', which I fully agree with. Winterson does still, however, thread her work with the belief in transcendent love. This is contradictory of Winterson, and passion's connection with Christ's suffering is just one example of this ultimate belief in the power of love. Agreement may be found with Pearce when returning to the issue that Winterson does not just make love transcendent, she also uses it as a means to destabilise hierarchical thinking. This destabilisation must necessarily be limited though because of the faith Winterson invests in love.

The Passion strays from offering a stereotypical heterosexual romance but is still nevertheless one that blatantly uses the genre to tell its story. There is a danger that this point may be misconstrued and it may be assumed that I am attempting to equate Winterson with Bunny Mix, the romantic fiction writer from *Boating for Beginners*. The ambivalence that Pearce spots in Winterson's writing allows *The Passion* to be read as both romantic fiction and political. It also explains the balance of the novel in that it rests on the ambivalence of paradoxical passion.

The stress on passion, and the necessary suffering that accompanies this according to de Rougemont and Winterson, also makes this an individualistic novel particularly when passion is attached to gambling. The repetition of the following quotation in *The Passion* affirms this: "You play, you win, you play, you lose. You play" (P 133). The novel's concern with war and gambling insists that there are always winners and losers, and this is offered as a metaphor for human relationships. This is because of the implication that love resembles war in that there will always be casualties. Rather

disconcertingly Villanelle resembles Napoleon in her solipsism and over-riding concern for self-preservation. Crucially, this self-centredness is also necessary for a Western love story to be viable: happy love has no history after all. Jackson exposes how individualism is a “key issue” when discussing love, as it relies on introspection and feelings (‘Women’ 51), and as cited in the previous chapter in relation to *Oranges*, Jackson clarifies how ideal love depends on two separate selves before merging can take place (‘Women’ 51). *The Passion* recognises the necessity of individuality for falling in love, and it ruthlessly insists on winners and losers. Typically of Winterson this is not a Utopian love story. Instead, *The Passion* has a Protestant ethos that allows the select few to enjoy pleasure. The weak are those who believe in reciprocity in romantic love, such as Henri, and he is consequently physically and mentally isolated from others. The ‘loser’ in this case has lost his liberty.

The Passion relies on a shifting ground of recognising that love requires individuals, but it also claims that identity is assumed rather than natural. Villanelle’s cross-dressing and the webbed feet that she inherits from her father blur her gender and hint that she can escape from the restrictions of biology. Henri’s memories of home and of looking at his reflection also offer an instance of an individual assuming provisional subjectivity, rather than his identity being essentialised:

This morning I smell the oats and I see a little boy watching his reflection in a copper pot he’s polished. His father comes in and laughs and offers him his shaving mirror instead. But in the shaving mirror the boy can only see one face. In the pot he can see all the distortions of his face. He sees many possible faces and so he sees what he might become. (P 26)

The favouring of the pot over the mirror is a strong reminder that Henri is retreating from the masculine values of war. This is enhanced as he uses the third person to talk about himself. It marks the difference between what he expects and what comes about after following Napoleon. Lisa Moore understands this reference as implying that Henri does not experience a loss of self, which is expected when in love, but a “multiplication of selves” (114). The cooking pot memory may also be interpreted as an indicator of how childhood dreams are broken down in adult life. The hopes for what might have been contrast with the actual violence of war as Henri recalls his home-life in relation to what has happened since. His loss of self is, however, also elemental to his insanity.

Henri understands in his madness that love can be liberating and that it does not have to be painful. Villanelle compares passion to having a leopard in the house, whereas Henri comes to see pleasure differently:

When I fell in love it was as though I looked into a mirror for the first time and saw myself. I lifted my hand in wonderment and felt my cheeks, my neck. This was me. And when I had looked at myself and grown accustomed to who I was, I was not afraid to hate parts of me because I wanted to be worthy of the mirror bearer. (*P* 155)

An obvious analysis of this quotation, in terms of psychoanalysis, depends on Lacan’s mirror-stage theory. It is as though Villanelle could be Henri’s assertion of (illusory) identity and she gives him security in being. Another reading is that love is strong enough to erase the memories of the killings that he has witnessed and committed. His love resembles the memory of the cooking pot because it helps him to forget the atrocities of the war, even if this is not entirely successful as the ghosts from earlier times and different places seek him out in his cell.

The war temporarily eliminates Henri's potential to love: "You can't make sense of your passion for life in the face of death, you can only give up your passion. Only then can you begin to survive" (P 82). But love also saves him in the shape of Villanelle. Love subsequently becomes vital, universal even, with Henri's voice. Pearce's expansion on the ambivalence in Winterson's use of romantic love can be divided between Henri and Villanelle to a certain extent: "This is an ambivalence that centres on a tension between the perception of romantic love as a non-gendered, a-historic, a-cultural 'universal', and as an 'ideology' which the specificities of gender and sexual orientation constantly challenge and undermine" ('Written' 148). This tension is evident in *The Passion* when contrasting Henri and Villanelle as opposites. The comparison between Villanelle's pragmatism and Henri's masculine adherence to chivalry holds the novel in a dialectic of materiality and dream. This is deconstructed, however, by Villanelle's passion, and romantic love, for the Queen of Spades after their first encounter, because this reduces Villanelle to Henri's madness: "It is the condition that most resembles a particular kind of mental disorder. I have seen ones like me in San Servolo" (P 62). Her sex and his offer an ostensible tension of sexual politics but close readings of both characters suggest that this tension is complex. This eventually undermines the polarisation of the sexes as Henri, rather than Villanelle, explores femininity as he criticises the effects that war has on love. In the final chapter of this thesis *The Powerbook* is examined as extending the theme of tension in relation to love, and *The Passion* is understood as a prototype for this interest.

Furthermore, *Oranges* precedes *The Passion* in its reliance on holding contrasting views up for analysis. As previously argued, *Oranges* depends on binary thinking for its characterisation of the mother and the daughter. It too has an interest in displaying the tension of opposites, but not so obviously as *The Passion* and *The Powerbook*.

Winterson's desire to examine the separateness of opposing terms invites a Hegelian analysis because of the potential for change that can come about with the friction between the two. Susana Onega and Scott Wilson invoke Hegel in their articles on Winterson's novels. Onega is writing in relation to *Oranges* and analyses the 'Deuteronomy' chapter in order to register how Winterson rejects "the concept of history as developed by Hegel" (137). Onega understands Winterson as challenging the theory that history is linear and progressive in 'Deuteronomy' and consequently believes that Winterson holds the master narrative at bay: "By so doing, Jeanette Winterson seems to advocate the acceptance of solipsism, of the old humanistic individualism and the impossibility of reconciliation of self and world" (139). Onega's point should also be linked to Winterson's investment in love as well as history. The 'fact' of romantic love depends on the 'humanistic individualism' that Onega stresses. History and love are both dependent on the power of the individual and the ability to win rather than lose. By embracing chance, as *The Passion* does, it is possible that self and world may be reconciled, but it also stands that this may not happen.

Wilson uses the figure of Hegel in conjunction with *The Passion* and is original in re-imagining the novel through the eyes of Hegel's mistress. Wilson also quotes the passage from *The Passion* where Henri describes falling in love as looking in a mirror for the first time and expands on this:

Hegel was not the only intellectual to misrecognize and fall for the perfected image of himself in the shape of Napoleon. The soldier, archivist and neck-wringer to the Emperor known as Henri, came to realise, like Hegel, that his love was unrequited. And before he went mad, he began to realise that the image in the mirror was a mis-recognition, that

it disclosed even as it appeared to fill, an indifferent gap sustained by the dialectic of desire itself. (62)

Wilson also specifically understands *The Passion* as disrupting the symmetry of the dialectic with the wild card of chance and passion:

The trouble with dialecticians, Winterson seems to suggest, is their inability to count up to four. Everything comes in threes: thesis, antithesis, synthesis; in its inexorable world historical progress, Spirit has no room for chickens, or for a singular passion for chickens. In his theory of history, Hegel did not consider a fourth term: something that could allow for chance, the unpredictable, the contingent, some event or happenstance, some peculiar predilection that exceeds the grasp of Spirit's all-consuming knowledge. (62- 63)

Where Pearce sees ambivalence in the use of tension it may be further argued that this is a demonstration of dialecticism bearing Wilson's point in mind. The novel is now demanding that one either learns to live with this tension or disturb it, as Wilson suggests, by chance. Winterson's ultimately idealised view of love contrasts with her use of chance, however, and may be interpreted as resembling Hegel's perspective of synthesis. Where Wilson interprets Winterson as introducing a fourth element of chance, it can also be argued that this element is conclusively disputed as the dream of the synthesis (or unification) of lovers is favoured. Even with the insertion of chance there are still winners and losers in *The Passion* as the dialectic re-asserts itself. And once more synthesis is the aim as love is described and prescribed as paramount. The tension in Winterson's work is continuously surfacing and then being surpassed by its expectations of love in all its guises.

Where Onega and Wilson suggest that Winterson differs from Hegel, it is just as fair to argue that *The Passion*, and Winterson's oeuvre generally, is ultimately sympathetic to Hegel and asks for synthesis in its idealisation of love. Chance does disrupt the dialectic but the theme of the transformative power of love that Winterson relies upon so often must surely be read as an emotion that will conclusively return to wanting a unification of selves. Paulina Palmer, in 'Lesbian Fiction and the Postmodern', usefully examines *The Passion* as working doubly, in that in spite of its "destructive effect" passion is still depicted as "life-enhancing", "since it is capable of transforming the individual's powers of perception and bringing an element of magic to an otherwise drab world" (166). An example of the miracle of love in *The Passion* can be seen in the survival of the Russian village when so many others had been burned to the ground. It escapes destruction because "a Russian high-ranker was in love with the daughter of the goatherd" (P 101). The novel continues: "Love it seems can survive even a war and a zero winter. Like the snow-raspberries, our host explained, love is like that, and he told us how these flimsy delicacies appear always in February, whatever the weather, whatever the prospects" (P 101). The magical aspect of Winterson's tale of passion is also embedded in the thrill of escaping insipidity and in the risk of the gamble.

Palmer explains that what lies behind the desire for the love object is equal to a passion for gambling: "The intensity of the passion which the individual feels, as is illustrated in numerous episodes, bears little or no relation to the value of the object on which it centres but, like the Lacanian concept of desire, it is a projection of the subject's inner needs" ('Lesbian' 166). The correlation between this concept of desire and the one that Freud understands as the need for religion in *Civilization and its Discontents* is explained by the self's sense of lack. Included in this is the belief that

desire creates the object it cannot master. It could be argued that Winterson's passion in *The Passion* is somewhere in between Freud and Lacan. It is also, "somewhere between the swamp and the mountains", and, "somewhere between fear and sex". Christianity is also used to attempt to pinpoint passion: "Somewhere between God and the Devil passion is and the way there is sudden and the way back is worse" (*P* 68). Uncomfortable passion cannot settle and has no fixed place. Gamblers, sweethearts, patriots and the religious each have their own particular relationship with passion in this work and this converges with Palmer's point about the projection of the subject's inner needs. *The Passion* posits that how one defines and understands love, and passion, depends on the subjective position of the reader, or lover.

The paradox of passion is that it can never be pain-free. Villanelle moves from supposing to knowing that passion is somewhere between fear and sex in chapter two. In this novel it does not just belong to Christianity, but is still the cross all the characters have to bear as it is universalised across sex and sexuality. The two narrators have an ambiguous relationship with God and religion. Henri's mother Georgette believes that Henri is destined to be a priest, as she considers it is better to burn than to marry: "St Paul said it is better to marry than to burn, but my mother taught me it is better to burn than to marry" (*P* 9). Unlike Jeanette's mother in *Oranges*, Georgette appears to question St. Paul, but he is only partially quoted. The full version of St. Paul's message reveals that Winterson is only telling part of the story: "Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1 Corinthians 7:25).⁹ By returning to the

⁹ Biblical references are quoted from *The Holy Bible: New International Version*

Book of Corinthians and St. Paul Winterson is qualifying and upholding the value of love, even when misquoting.

Henri expects his passion to be returned by God and as it is not, he decides he cannot be a priest (*P* 10). This childlike rationalisation has its logic in a desire for reciprocity, for intersubjectivity, and is the same disappointment he is subjected to when Napoleon, then Villanelle, fail to respond to him as he wishes. Villanelle is more relaxed in her view of organised religion and passion, and offers a less absolutist perspective. As Henri swings between love and hate after the defining experience of being disappointed by Napoleon, Villanelle practices her Venetian pragmatism: “Bask in it. In spite of what the monks say, you can meet God without getting up early. You can meet God lounging in the pew. The hardship is a man-made device because man cannot exist without passion. Religion is somewhere between fear and sex” (*P* 74). Through Villanelle, passion’s association with religion is maintained outside the confines of the institution. Its continued association with religion enhances the worthiness of love within the limits of Western thinking yet again

Villanelle’s Venetian background is the perfect trope for a novel that thrives on ambivalence and ambiguity. When the narrators finally arrive in Venice it is at first a positive beginning for Henri. It is as though this is the final stage of the search, as though he has reached the end of the rainbow: “Arriving at Venice by sea, as one must, is like seeing an invented city rise up and quiver in the air” (*P* 109). The city is built on water and always appears to be on the verge of collapse. It is the ideal location to present passion as double-edged and ambiguous because of its precarious existence. Because of this doubleness, Venice resembles passion in not offering Henri pure happiness. As argued earlier, the very infrastructure of Venice (as with the Rialto Bridge) is literally constructed with complexity, just as passion is.

Venice's historical fall from republic status to being colonised offers a direct comparison with Villanelle who is sold to the army by her French husband. Venice signifies Villanelle's appropriation and more broadly it historicises the patriarchal obsession with plunder. Manfred Pfister and Barbara Schaff explain in the Introduction to *Venetian Views, Venetian Blinds* how Venice's geographical and historical position lends itself to being a site for representing unfixed positions, and for challenging the hegemony of heterosexuality and femininity:

As an ambiguous city, whose liminal position between land and water, East and West, obliterates differences as well as puts them in focus, as the city of masquerades where performance is the overall rule, Venice has always been particularly attractive to female authors who have battled in life and letters against restricting gender roles and gendering notions of aesthetic concepts. (5)

Geographically, Venice unites East and West and Pfister notes how it has been recalled textually as a symbol for Western power and for the exoticism which is typical of Orientalism (16). It is a place that has become the archetype of colonisation. Pfister builds on Tony Tanner's arguments and describes literary presentations of Venice as "one-way traffic", in that Venice is predominantly written about by 'outsiders', that is, non-Venetians (16). The paradox of using Venice as a trope for colonisation, whilst also making it exotic, is then observable in *The Passion*. Winterson's reliance on Venice as a means to depict both constraints on freedom and potential for change is ironically one more act of colonisation.

Tony Tanner, in *Venice Desired*, remembers the historical context of the city: "It effectively disappeared from history altogether in 1797 when the thousand-year republic was defeated by Napoleon, and later handed over to the Austrians. After that,

it seems to exist as a curiously marooned spectacle” (4). Venice and Villanelle double each other in that the former independent state is colonised by the enemy. The multiplicity of selves that Henri looks back on in his childhood memory is mirrored in this doubling of characters with each other, and with the identification of the city with a woman. This parallel is also drawn by Henry James in *The Art of Travel* when he describes Venice thus: “The creature varies like a nervous woman, whom you know only when you know all aspects of her beauty” (389). Specifically for this thesis, Venice is also famously (even obsessively) a site for writing about passion and desire: “Desire of Venice, desire for Venice, desire in Venice, - this is a crucial force and feature in European literature from Byron to Sartre” (Tanner, *Venice* 4). *The Passion* belongs to the long history of siting desire in this city. By using Venice as a main backdrop, the novel seamlessly becomes one which will inevitably be about desire because its literary past has determined it. Pfister convincingly argues this point: “*The Passion* might be the title or subtitle of almost any fiction localised in Venice ever since the Renaissance...” (16). Pfister goes on to list texts such as *Unfortunate Traveller*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Comfort of Strangers*, which firmly positions Venice as a recurrent textual reference.

As a place between East and West it is important not to over-romanticise Venice or to understand it only as a colony. This pragmatism differs from *The Passion*'s idealisation of Venice's 'victim' status. The city's ephemeral 'mercurial' nature offers a spatial metaphor for the ambiguity of passion. Its past is diverse; it has been both a republic and a colony.

Venice's historical past infiltrates the content of the story. Ruggiero's *Boundaries of Eros* looks to Renaissance Venice and outlines how hands were removed as a punishment for men who raped noble women. In *The Passion*, some four hundred

years later the hands are removed as a lesson for the dangers of gambling. The gambler's passion is paid for with the weight of Venice's history.

The history of Venice is replayed when the gambler loses his life and his hands become trophies. Passion for gambling overtakes the man's life as he searches for the conclusive thrill, the ultimate stake, and finds it in the casino. The Cook's demise is another historical throwback to Venice's past. He rapes and abuses his wife Villanelle and his punishment for his 'passion' is also paid for in his body's parts. Ruggiero cites a case from 1390s Venice, where a man who was accused of rape was sentenced to having his hands chopped off and hung around his neck on a chain before being hanged (92). The Cook's dismemberment is tied to the history of Venice and the Romance of the novel because of the removal of his heart. The Cook's passions are consistently lacking in reciprocity and, as with Napoleon, he thinks only of his own desires and excludes others. His death offers a poetic, even romantic, justice and complies with Venice's history of mutilating sinners.

The Passion is a love story. It requires obstacles to make its love all the more poignant. It also morally directs the reader against the passion that turns into obsession. Whereas passion is purposely drawn as an ambiguous and ambivalent facet of love, obsession is depicted negatively. This is a warning against fixing the meaning of passion because it will then become obsession. This occurs when Henri explains his loathing for Napoleon: "If the love was passion, the hate will be obsession" (*P* 84). The blind acceptance of the tyrant ironically melts after Henri loses an eye. His obsession also contributes to his insanity as he becomes Napoleon when isolated on the Rock. Villanelle explains the impact of Napoleon's fall from Henri's grace: "He disappointed him. Passion does not take disappointment well" (*P* 147). His love for

Napoleon turns to hatred and Henri physically becomes the enemy Nelson when he loses an eye.

Obsession in *The Passion* is also the outcome of passion when it is taken to its logical extreme. Similarly to passion it does not operate by rationality, and madness signifies the extremity of both emotions. The obsession that the Cook has for Villanelle exemplifies the negativity of passion that has overreached itself. He simply wants Villanelle as an object of desire. His murder is morally justified in the narrative, because he is clearly the arch-villain who has no redeeming characteristics. From the outset he is depicted as one who has no regard for others and his cruelty towards the prostitute in the brothel is an early indicator of his misogyny. His passion/obsession disregards humanity and acts as a warning for those who forget that their objects of desire are human. He turns his desires into inanimate objects and his behaviour is a re-enactment of Napoleon's on a micro-level.

The Cook also has a parallel in the Queen of Spades. This is particularly evident when Henri is searching her house for Villanelle's heart and he notices a tapestry that depicts Villanelle sitting cross-legged in front of a pack of cards. He notices it is "some three-quarters done" (*P* 119). When he tells Villanelle about it her face whitens: "Why was she so upset? Because if the tapestry had been finished and the woman had woven in her heart, she would have been a prisoner for ever" (*P* 121). The Queen's attempt at containing Villanelle in the tapestry tallies with the mounted insects on the walls of the house. It is also reminiscent of Poe's 'The Oval Portrait' where the artist is painting his beloved. This artist becomes so engrossed in the replication that he loses himself in her image. By the time Poe's artist has finished his painting, the model, who is also his wife, has died. Villanelle's Queen also de-humanises her lover and turns her into an object and this is again where the narrative

posits that passion has become an unhealthy obsession. Parallels may also be drawn with *Written on the Body*, where the narrator and Louise's love for each other is often depicted as destructive. By instilling passion with the element of chance, the outcome cannot always be life-enhancing. The theme of chance is also another means to allow this and other Winterson novels to be ones that do not have a 'happy history'.

The Passion draws on other literary sources apart from the obvious texts associated with quests and Poe's short story. The Queen of Spades, for example, is Villanelle's lover and also the title of a short story by Pushkin. Pushkin's Queen is a symbol of winning by revenge, which occurs when a ghost tells Hermann the three cards that will win him his fortune. Instead of the third card being an ace as he is informed, the eponymous Queen is revealed. This loss drives Hermann insane (as happens to Henri) and he is last seen in a mental hospital. Hermann and Henri both lose to passion, and the Queen of Spades. For both texts the passion for gambling to win with high stakes proves addictive. In *The Passion* the minor characters are the obvious gamblers for money, such as the Queen, the Cook and the man who stakes his life. Their pleasure in taking risks is introduced by Villanelle who admits to being attracted by the passion that drives people to stake everything. The allusiveness of *The Passion* adds layers to these obsessive gamblers' stories. It also makes the text stretch across time and space in its obsession with becoming the quintessential love story.

The conclusions that may be drawn from this novel and this chapter are that passion is advocated as a perfect kind of loving in its ambivalence and movement away from the more concentrated obedience of courtly and romantic love. It is also differentiated from the obsession that turns a lover into an inanimate object. The dichotomous nature of passion is welcomed in its pain and pleasure by both narrators. Henri's insane truth-telling is the ideal vehicle for representing how passion is

ambiguous. Passion's value lies in its ambiguity, which is also personified by Villanelle's cross-dressing antics. The instability of the term allows it to offer both freedom and constraint to lovers and that is why Winterson's passion is always qualified. The instability of passion is continued and magnified with the historical framework of the Napoleonic Wars, where the fear of death extinguishes the (false) certainty of life. It is also continued in the geography of Venice, the liminal city. The following reference is Henri's paean to love. It summarises the paradox of limited freedom when conjoined with falling in love. The loss of self, which is intrinsic to romantic love and passion, may be interpreted as a loss of freedom and of individuality or it may be embraced as liberating: "I think now that being free is not being powerful or rich or well regarded or without obligations but being able to love. To love someone else enough to forget about yourself even for one moment is to be free" (*P* 154). The dream of the unification of lovers is offered here as Henri voices the desire for synthesis. The dialectic of freedom and imprisonment is continuously re-stated as love and this synthesis again breaks down into freedom and imprisonment. Finally, it is love in all its various forms that is always present at the core of the ambiguity and ambivalence that Winterson proffers.

Chapter Three

Writing Strategies: Love, Politics and Art

Sexing the Cherry

Up to this point Winterson's writing strategies and style of writing about love have only been looked at in passing. This chapter uses *Sexing the Cherry* to identify her strategies more succinctly. This is a continued examination of how Winterson both engages with the material conditions of marginalisation, yet also considers love and art as transcendent thematic concerns. Laura Doan's 'Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Postmodern*' clarifies how Winterson 'exploits' different writing strategies in *Sexing the Cherry*:

Eschewing realism, Winterson constructs her narrative by exploiting the techniques of postmodern historiographic metafiction (such as intertextuality, parody, pastiche, self-reflexivity, fragmentation, the rewriting of history and frame breaks) as well as its ideology (questioning 'grand narratives', problematizing closure, valorizing instability, suspecting coherence, and so forth) in order to challenge and subvert patriarchal and heterosexist discourses and, ultimately, to facilitate a forceful and radical opposition critique. (138)

Doan also suggests that in *Sexing the Cherry* Winterson is successful in implementing postmodern techniques for political motives. These are, according to Doan, the promulgation and validation of lesbian desire. As quoted in the first chapter of this thesis, Doan suggests that *Oranges* is still trapped in the binaries that the narrator Jeanette is criticising and argues that the lesbian writer should be exploding binaries. For Doan, *Sexing the Cherry* disrupts oppositional thinking more effectively than

Oranges and *The Passion*: “In *Sexing the Cherry* Winterson launches her most successful incursion to overturn the “natural” and collapse such distinctions as nature/culture or inner/outer, for what is imagined is nothing less than a wholly new genesis of gender” (150). Doan is alluding to the twelve princesses’ stories, the titular motif of grafting (because this is implied in the ‘sexing’ of the cherry) and Jordan’s cross-dressing, as aspects that undermine binary thinking. The heightened language and eschewing of realism that Doan highlights, combined with the familiar theme of love, allow the reader to interpret Winterson’s romantic love as approaching originality. This uncertain love and personal cartography is extended in *Written on the Body* as the gender-unspecified narrator never decisively tells the reader if the beloved Louise is dead or alive, or even if she is a figment of his/her imagination. The only certainty of *Written on the Body* is the love and sense of loss felt by the narrator. Love and lack consequently become paramount themes as gender is removed by virtue of the ‘unknowable’ narrator - unknowable, that is, in terms of binary thinking.

Doan suggests that *Sexing the Cherry* is more successful than earlier Winterson novels in overturning the idea of the natural, but it should be remembered that *Oranges* and *The Passion* also destabilise the hegemony that values the natural over the unnatural. Although love is considered transcendent, it is often used as a means to challenge hegemony. Winterson’s use of love is often politicised in favour of questioning dominant heterosexual romances. She also often writes of love as a fiction so the argument that loving is natural is undermined. *Oranges* insists, for example, that the bond between mother and daughter is a construction. It is self-consciously aware of the postmodern orthodoxy that questions the truth of biologically-based liberal humanism. *The Passion* urges the reader to consider the value of uncertain passion rather than the delusion of naturalised obedience and

supposedly natural, life-negating obsession. It pushes for ambiguity and uses romance, in its most general sense, as a vehicle to displace the stultifying effects of fixity.

Diane Elam's *Romancing the Postmodern* explains how the Romance is a destabilising format and is, to some extent, equivalent to the label of postmodern. Elam's following point may be understood in relation not only to *Oranges and The Passion*, but also to all of the later Winterson novels:

Inevitably thematized within textuality, the romance genre transgresses the distinction of form and content, which has traditionally governed genre studies. Romance makes us, in a word, uncomfortable because we are never quite sure what romance may mean or how it may mean. Romance seems in excess of itself, stepping beyond the lines which have always limited its definition. (7)

By relying on the unstable genre of Romance Winterson is, in Elam's terms, transgressing categorisation. It is not sufficient to regard Winterson as just a postmodern writer. Because Winterson tends to rely on love as a central theme in her writing the destabilisation of the grand narrative is never quite completed. The contradiction of her strategy now becomes clearer. Through the repeated invocation of love, and the Romance in its unstable form, Winterson is both deconstructing fixity and yet re-affirming a sense of timelessness. Love is threaded through her work as a constant, but love is also employed as a narrative device to unsettle traditional thinking of what love actually is.

Sexing the Cherry embraces the Romance even more firmly than *The Passion* as Jordan (who is a co-narrator with his adoptive mother Dog-Woman) travels both across seas and internally in his imagination in a way that is reminiscent of

romanticism. He becomes a romantic in his self-absorption and in his preference for the city of the interior over the physical adventures of travel. Winterson slips from one period in literature to another and this slippage is another means of defying categorisation. She also evades the category of only being a political writer.

Winterson's writing has been accused of lacking political commitment by Lisa Moore in relation to *The Passion*, and I have cited Paulina Palmer in her criticism of Moore's article in the previous chapter of this thesis. It is not so much that Winterson's work lacks political commitment, as I go on to argue that there is evident engagement with the materiality of oppression, but that Winterson is not only a writer of such topics. She is also concerned with the use of language and its relationship to art. Her novels are not only interested in revealing aspects of marginalisation, they are also means to explore a desire for transformation. *Sexing the Cherry*'s material awareness of the dangers of romantic love lies foremost in the story of the twelve dancing princesses, where another time and place underlines past and present-day misogyny. The combined effect of the twelve dancing princesses' stories, which are an essential ingredient of *Sexing the Cherry*, show poetically how enforced coupling can be a disastrous concept. Paulina Palmer's 'Jeanette Winterson: Lesbian/Postmodern Fictions' notes how Winterson rewrites the brothers Grimm tale for her own purposes: "Whereas the original version of the story by the brothers Grimm portrays a male spy outwitting and foiling women's attempt to free themselves from patriarchal control and lead their own lives, Winterson's parodic revision represents women outwitting men" (185).

Fiction and fantasy redefine romantic love in this revision and suggest, as Catherine Belsey implies, that romantic love is potentially enslaving. Belsey's *Desire* analyses *Written on the Body* and *The Passion* but the general declaration she makes

about love may be applied to *Sexing the Cherry* because Belsey focuses on the idealisation of love and on how it is corrupted by sinister implications:

And true love, too, itself another kind of fundamentalism, has legalized prohibitions, coercions, narrow properties, expropriations and the transformation of people into property. With the best of intentions, the metaphysical ideal of true love, and the concomitant efforts of the modern Western world to confine and contain desire within the legality of marriage, have produced, we are now in a position to acknowledge, at best a lifetime of surveillance and self surveillance for the couple in question, and at worst the perfect opportunity for domestic violence and child abuse, concealed within the privacy of the nuclear family. (74)

By criticising the ‘truth’ of the ‘metaphysical ideal of true love’ Belsey exposes how love can be used as a form of subjugation. The princesses’ stories reveal this material truth allegorically. The princesses can defy gravity but cannot withstand their father’s desire that they should marry. Only Fortunata, who is the lightest, evades the pain her sisters had to endure. Winterson uses the fairy tale rather than documentary to explore the entrapment of marriage. This tactic may be construed as making light of oppression but by going beyond realism Winterson allows for a different method to depict the negative facet of love in adult heterosexual relationships. The eleven princesses who are forced to marry have to endure the antithesis of the fairy tale happy ending, because their happiness does not come about with marriage. Some of their stories re-tell others. Rapunzel, *The Taming of the Shrew* and Paolo and Francesca are just some of the evident intertexts. The princess who stabs her husband and his lover with one blow, for example, re-invents Paolo and Francesca’s fate, which is incidentally revisited in *The Powerbook*.

One of the husbands calls his wife Jess, and she is in thrall to her master. When she finally rebels against him and tears his liver from his body she does not know why he is surprised: “I don’t know why. As your lover describes you, so you are” (S 56). With ‘Jess’ the abused wife is given the power to absorb the hurt and is allowed to re-appropriate it. From this position, the married princesses’ stories materially question the abuse of love. These allegories do not negate love as such but insist instead that abuse in the name of convention, be that marriage or romantic love, is unacceptable. Their separate stories also reiterate how women can be mis-served in fairy tales and canonised works, and are often the victims in domestic violence. This time, however, the princesses are given voices to speak.

True to the format of the fairy tale the princesses do experience happiness in their escape but the scars of their betrayals and marriages are inevitably included in their stories. The princesses desire freedom from their father and want to be individuals who can chose their own form of romantic love, which resembles Jeanette’s ambition in *Oranges*. The princesses cannot join the floating city because of the betrayal by their father and the princes and this again echoes the betrayal that Jeanette experiences. The idea that another place is where real freedom lies is referentially a nostalgic understanding of utopianism, but interestingly this dream is not associated with belonging to another. It is a space similar to the ‘no-woman’s land’ that Onega notices in Jeanette’s fantasies, which is quoted in relation to *Oranges* in chapter one of this thesis.

This sense of no-woman’s land is found in the imagination of the (lesbian) artist-prophet in *Oranges*. In *Sexing the Cherry* this figure is represented by Jordan. He is the conduit for the stories of these princesses as he meets them in his imagination. He also re-creates the time and place he is born into and these imaginings function as

links between his era and the twentieth century. The story of the City of Love connects Jordan's own time of Puritanical distaste for public pleasure and the era that *Sexing the Cherry* is written in. In Jordan's City love is feared because a plague could break out, which evokes Puritanism as well as the panic in the early nineteen-eighties. This panic was given oxygen with the homophobia surrounding supposed knowledge of the AIDS virus. This City enables a synchronic exploration of the similarities between Puritanical hypocrisy and hateful, homophobic reactions to AIDS, such as the 'gay plague'. Love in all three dimensions (Jordan's imaginary city, seventeenth-century Puritan London and nineteen-eighties Britain) is regarded as dangerous by dominant discourses. It is as though by denying love and lust in all three time zones a citizen will morally improve. The synchronicity that Jordan employs and observes as an outsider implies that nothing has changed as the Church and the media are written of as having decided what love is. Through Jordan's stories the concept of progress is undermined. More positively, love is rescued from the Church and the media as Jordan heroically saves it from only having negative connotations.

Jordan's representations of love are, however, bittersweet. The idea of love being penalised by death is used twice in *Sexing the Cherry* explicitly. It is mentioned in the City where love is forbidden and is also referred to by one of the princesses. This resembles the paranoia generated by misinformation in the press about AIDS. This also recognises that death is a possible outcome when sex is unprotected. Jordan's story becomes dystopian when the citizens of the City of Love vote for death in preference to living without love. This other world he invents suggests that love should conquer but the death drive succeeds instead, which parallels Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. It is also reminiscent of the twinning of love and aggression that Freud highlights in *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

Heather Nunn, in '*Written on the Body: An Anatomy of Horror, Melancholy and Love*', makes a passing referential link between Louise's leukaemia in *Written on the Body* and AIDS and appears to conflate the two diseases, which is problematic as one is a virus and the other is cancer. Nunn's argument breaks down when she draws an analogy between the two illnesses: "in a society disrupted by AIDS and the HIV virus any disease of the blood has powerful connotations" (24). The description of the City of Love in *Sexing the Cherry* does, however, bear parallels with the panic induced by early media reports on AIDS.

Another version of the City of Love appears 'some years later' in *Sexing the Cherry*, when the twentieth century Dog-Woman is fearful for the future of the planet and works to publicise how multi-national companies neglect the environment. The mercury that poisons this Dog-Woman is present because of greed and lack of consideration inherent in a capitalist system. Love is of no importance to these companies and is equally disavowed in Jordan's City. Gain has become the new God. The ideal of an improved (technological) future is seen to outweigh the needs of those living in the present and this is the same outlook as the hypocritical seventeenth century Puritan Scroggs. With the use of synchronicity the present shifts across the centuries, allowing for a political questioning of the minimal regard that has been, and is, paid by the Church, the state and capitalism to the individual. With the invocation of love in Jordan's own inner world, and in his magical transportation to 'now', nothing has changed. The future and the past merge: "The future and the present and the past exist only in our minds, and from a distance the borders of each shrink and fade like the borders of hostile countries seen from a floating city in the sky" (S 144). Linear time becomes immaterial and uncertain because of Jordan's imagination and

this in turn maintains *Sexing the Cherry*'s leanings towards Elam's definition of Romance, where there is a deconstruction of the certainty of meaning.

Political engagement is evident in Winterson's writings but it is only one aspect of her work. When *Art Objects* is read in conjunction with *Sexing the Cherry* (and other Winterson novels) it becomes rather narrow to read it as only a political allegory. Love and art are means for transformation in *Art Objects* and it is the "love of language" that links the author to the reader (*AO* 34). Care also needs to be taken if the City of Love story is reduced to only a re-enactment of the reporting of AIDS in the media. In *Art Objects* Winterson states, "a great deal of gay writing, especially gay writing around the AIDS crisis, is therapy, is release, is not art" (104).

Art Objects is a series of essays that repeatedly promotes art as life-enhancing. Art is continuously examined and exalted and so, by default, if something is not art in Winterson's terms it is not so valuable. Awkward issues are being raised here such as the hierarchisation of one type of writing over another. However, when working within *Art Objects*' rubric, if one is only looking for a material reading the process may be understood as diluting *Sexing the Cherry* to just therapy, release or polemic.

Doan establishes, quite rightly, that love for Winterson, and Jeanette in *Oranges*, is transcendent, and argues that such a belief validates how binaries are implicitly understood by Winterson as artificial:

Winterson's claim on behalf of the transcendence of love - rendering whichever way one is born inconsequential - seems to sidestep neatly the question of whether such categories of oppositions are themselves natural or cultural. The claim undoes itself, however, for asserting that anything can "rise above" such oppositions is an act of cultural intervention, revealing those oppositions as cultural fictions;..." (144)

This faith in love, which Doan outlines, colours all of Winterson's novels, including *Sexing the Cherry*. In opposition to Doan, it must be argued that to presume love is transcendent is to suggest that hierarchical thinking is acceptable. Doan is falsely moulding Winterson's entire understanding of love into a postmodern belief system. Winterson's faith in love is a contradiction of the postmodern techniques that she employs, and which Doan lists when arguing that *Sexing the Cherry* is 'eschewing realism'. When Winterson claims that love is transcendent she is departing from appreciating the liberating aspects of love when it is understood as a construct. Love is a fiction in Winterson's novels but when it is held in esteem and privileged the process of deconstruction is frozen and transcendence remains unquestioned. At times Winterson is, as Doan claims, influenced by postmodern and poststructuralist thought and embraces the lack of fixity that these terms allow for. However, love for Winterson is also simultaneously separated from such reasoning and is considered to be a timeless value that is worth searching for. It is from this perspective that *Sexing the Cherry*, and Winterson's understanding of love, may be validly accused of being apolitical.

A consistent theme in *Sexing the Cherry* is the emphasis on the inward, the inside and not just the outer world. It is arguable whether this deconstructs the inner/outer binary, or is simply a privileging of the inner at the expense of the outer. Jordan is not only an adventurer on the high seas, but is also one who believes in the power of the inner world: "To escape from the weight of the world, I leave my body where it is, in conversation or at dinner, and walk through a series of winding streets to a house standing back from the road" (S 17). Jordan's internal means of escape offers a different fictional landscape from that which is offered through voyages with Tradescant. The different places visited in *Sexing the Cherry*, such as the City of

Words and the City of Love are reminiscent of *Oranges*' recourse to fantasy. In *Oranges* the fairy tales are separated from Jeanette's actual life, whereas in *Sexing the Cherry* there is fluidity because Jordan's journeys and fantasies are integral to the main narrative. It is Jordan's imagination that allows the reader to enter the twelve dancing princesses' worlds, the City of Words and the City of Love. We are given an introduction to the potency of thought when Dog-Woman puts her head against Jordan's when he looks at a banana for the first time. On doing this she sees the same deep blue waters and birds in fairground colours that he does (*S* 13). The reader moves into the realm of (another) fantasy with Dog-Woman as Jordan becomes the adventurer-story-teller. The power of imagination is illustrated as she sees through Jordan's eyes.

This ability to make others see as you do means that Jordan's narration gives the reader new ways of seeing old stories. Gillian Beer's *The Romance* helps to establish how Jordan is influenced by the history of romance and romanticism:

But whereas the immediately post-Cervantic attitude to romance tended to establish the exclusiveness of the romance world, thus increasing the dangers of frivolity, writers of the Romantic period, such as Schlegel and Coleridge, recognized that the romance expressed a world permanently within all men: the world of imagination and of dream. (7)

In Jordan's search for Fortunata (who is the woman who does not exist), the reader is taken on voyages composed through the mind. Because of Jordan, *Sexing the Cherry* becomes distanced from *The Passion* in that the 'city of the interior', rather than an actual place, is the main focus of the novel. This premise is set out at the beginning of *Sexing the Cherry*: "Every journey conceals another journey within its lines: the path not taken and the forgotten angle. These are journeys 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” (S 9).

When the philosopher of a village warns Jordan against loving, a ‘discourse’ on love ensues where love is attacked and defended with evidence from ancient literature. Jordan recalls Penelope, Sappho and Castor and Pollux to remind the villagers of the benefits of romantic, idealised love. The inclusion of Penelope is a reminder of Henri’s allusions to Ulysses in *The Passion* except this time the passivity of waiting is stressed rather than the desire to search. The parallel between *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* is obvious in the continued deification of ‘necessary suffering’ in association with loving. Unrequited love is once again held in esteem. The tragedy of Castor and Pollux, who could not bear to be separated from each other, characterises Jordan’s impossible search for Fortunata and this returns the reader to the story about Jordan’s inner search. After the debate about love with the philosopher his inner feelings are vented: “I stayed where I was with my shoulders against the rough sea wall and asked myself what I hadn’t asked the others. Was I searching for a dancer whose name I did not know or was I searching for the dancing part of myself?” (S 40)

Another reading of *Sexing the Cherry* becomes available when it is analysed in relation to T. S. Eliot’s ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’. *Art Objects* refers specifically to this essay and discusses Eliot’s allegiance to impersonality and distancing oneself from the poet when reading a poem. As may be seen in this example, there is also an intertextual clue for tracing the roots of Jordan’s narrative voice: “Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality” (Eliot 21). Jordan’s art of storytelling is grounded in this above reference. It may be incongruous to claim this

in conjunction with the reference to impersonality, but Jordan becomes the epitome of a good writer in Winterson and Eliot's terms. The emotional high and low aspects of Jordan's narrative are enmeshed in his wish to distance himself from what is around him. He wants to escape the restraints of his gender and his present surroundings as Eliot prescribes. But he also wishes to engage with his present and resemble Dog-Woman in spirit. Jordan's voice is fractured between telling his stories and loving his mother. It is also divided between loving Fortunata and knowing that she does not exist. Jordan struggles with being impersonal.

Lynn Pykett's 'A New Way With Words?' also recognises how Winterson embraces the modern and postmodern in her writing and examines the connection between *Sexing the Cherry* and *Four Quartets* that is hinted at in *Art Objects*:

Sexing the Cherry is a speculative fiction which returns time and again to the preoccupations of Eliot's poem: history, consciousness, desire, the unredeemability of time, the perpetual presence of the past and future, ceaseless journeying and exploration, the river that is 'within us'. (58)

The return to Eliot's poem is also observable in the naming of Jordan. He is the river of the narrative in his name and in his 'ceaseless journeying'. On one level Jordan is a tool for exploring the transience of love. On another, his words reflect the complexities of his characterisation and of the novel. Now the narrative of *Sexing the Cherry* becomes a web as it uses familiar notions of time, place and love to unsettle the reader from realist complacency. When Jordan claims, "as for your beloved, she didn't understand you. The truth is, you never understood yourself", he reveals the provisional nature of loving and of identity (S 74). This reference is also a reflection of *Art Objects*' subject matter, which reflects back again to Jordan: "It may well be that nothing solid actually exists but what might exist is energy, is space. And I have

not discovered a more energetic space than art. But I have said these things in *Sexing the Cherry*" (AO 169).

By continuing to understand Jordan as a writer, the art of manipulation is made evident when he sees the beloved as a work of fiction. It may also disturb the reader when Jordan's narcissism becomes evident: "I may be cynical when I say that very rarely is the beloved more than a shaping spirit for the lover's dream" (S 74). His love for Fortunata has never been real in the accepted sense, because she has never existed. This concept of the lover as fictional is extended in *Written on the Body*. Stevi Jackson's 'Women and Heterosexual Love' describes the transformative power of the fiction of love as such: "The other we pursue so compulsively is frequently our own creation, the 'real' person we think we love may be no more than a pretext around which our fantasies are woven" (53). Jordan has become a writer in creating other worlds to draw the reader in. Fortunata symbolises what Jackson understands as the lover creating the beloved, because Fortunata never existed. Jordan's physical pursuit of her mimics the imaginative process of falling in love with another. It is also a strategy for demonstrating the association between creating a lover and creating a story.

In the Introduction to *Oranges* Winterson admits to manipulating the reader to listen to Jeanette's story, to adopt her perspective rather than the religious fanaticism of her mother. This persuades the reader to sympathise with the narrator who is a lesbian when ordinarily this might not have happened (*O* xiii). Jordan is another figure to be listened to, but for aesthetic rather than overtly political reasons. Eliot, in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', states: "The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not actual emotions at all" (21). When Jordan says, "in a

single day the mind can make a millpond of the oceans” there is a contrast between the poetic and the physical and it is language that overpowers the everyday and challenges perceptions of time and place as Eliot suggests (*S* 80).

Winterson’s reverence for language is also apparent in her appreciation of Virginia Woolf’s writing, and the connection between Woolf’s *Orlando* and *Sexing the Cherry* is clarified in Winterson’s *Art Objects*. A recent television programme about *Orlando*, which was devised and presented by Winterson, re-affirms the original theory of *Art Objects* that *Orlando* is an influential novel for Winterson.¹ Love and romance as well as shifts in time, identity and place unite these two texts: *Orlando* and *Sexing the Cherry* are primarily romances as they entertain ideas of ‘stepping beyond the lines’ of gender roles and travelling through time. Elemental to both novels is the use of love as a metaphor for transformation. Both novelists also claim that love is transcendent. Winterson argues in *Art Objects* that this is the case for *Orlando*:

Love objects, male and female, are appropriately wooed and bedded but not according to the confines of heterosexual desire. The lover knows what it is to be the beloved. The beloved knows in her own body the power of the lover. The Orlando who holds Sasha in his arms is still the Orlando who holds Shelmerdine in hers. Woman to woman, man to man, is the sub-sexuality of Orlando. (*AO* 66)

Language in *Orlando*, *Sexing the Cherry* and *Art Objects* is comparable to love in that it has the power to alter and make new. The ‘art’ of love in this sense is poetic and transformative; the art of love as deception is considered in the sixth chapter of this thesis in relation to *Gut Symmetries*. The influence of modernist texts on Winterson’s

¹ This is a reference to the programme *Art That Shook the World*.

work is apparent. Doan's interpretation of 'modern' and 'postmodern' disparages the separation caused by categorisation and disputes the notion that there is a strict demarcation between the two terms. By doing this Doan deconstructs their false opposition: "The postmodern doesn't transcend the modern; it rereads the modern, not from beyond, but from within" (14). When noticing the influence of modernism on Winterson's work, it is clear, however, that this is where her love for hierarchies, and the hierarchisation of love, has some of its origins. As Doan states, 'the postmodern doesn't transcend the modern' but modernism does in effect still embrace the concept of privilege, which Winterson also favours.

The narrative strategies in *Orlando* resemble those in *Sexing the Cherry*. This becomes particularly obvious when following the lead from the chapter 'A Gift of Wings' in *Art Objects*. Winterson's interpretation of *Orlando* is again equally applicable to *Sexing the Cherry*: "Woolf's connections across time and space, through the inner and outer worlds of imagination and experience, are made brilliantly, vertiginously, with not a glance over the edge" (*AO* 73). Within this reference there are reverberations that move from Woolf to Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry*, and back again. The connection between the two authors is further enhanced by Winterson's recent involvement with the re-publishing of Woolf's nine novels.²

Love is used in both novels to unsettle the boundaries that are formed by linear time and the gendered body. Further to these two issues, the aesthetic constructed categories of modern and postmodern are open to a critique using feminist poststructuralist criticism. There is a danger involved with blurring these categories and bringing these two novels closer together because the action may be construed as

² Winterson and Margaret Reynolds have been asked by Vintage to commission and edit new introductions for Woolf's nine novels. See the Woolf mini-site on jeanettewinterson.com for more specific details.

reducing both of them to a bland oneness of similarities, and this is a difficulty that arises with assuming synchronicity. It should be made clear at this point that there is no intended undercurrent to this section of the chapter that claims Winterson is the heir to Woolf's literary throne. The aim is instead to appreciate dual, but different, dreams of love in worlds that interrogate the humanist present.

Elaine Showalter's measured judgement of *Orlando* in *A Literature of Their Own* is that it is, "tedious high camp" (291). Toril Moi's unfolding of Showalter's general misinterpretations of Woolf's textual strategies in *Sexual/Textual Politics* offers a broadly feminist poststructuralist retrieval of Woolf's fiction from would-be biographers, and negative value judgements. Moi reveals Showalter's traditional humanist approach in her evaluation of Woolf's fictional strategies: "She has understood that the goal of the feminist struggle must precisely be to deconstruct the death-dealing binary oppositions of masculinity and femininity" (*Sexual/Textual* 13). When examining this quotation in its specific context, it is apparent that Moi is defending Woolf's use of androgyny from Showalter's accusation that Woolf is fleeing from gendered identity. Moi is referring to *To the Lighthouse* and the destructiveness of fixed gender roles to further her point. She views Woolf as rejecting fixity rather than fleeing to androgyny.

An elaboration on Moi's position reveals that *Orlando* turns to the openness of deconstruction rather than being mired in destruction. Moi's reading of Woolf acts as a bridge and brings Woolf closer to Winterson. Essentially, these two writers are aware of 'death-dealing' binaries. Pursuing a non-humanist or anti-humanist enquiry into these two texts, following Moi's defence of Woolf, also enables them to be read at a distance from a biographical account of how much Virginia loves Vita, or

Jeanette loves Peggy. The ‘tedious’ recourse to biography to explain the novel, especially in the guise of feminism, is to be avoided if, as Moi points out, one is striving to avoid a phallogocentric appreciation of the texts.

Art Objects is another bridge between the novelists because here Winterson parallels Moi in valuing Woolf’s anti-humanist sensibilities in *Orlando*: “Woolf smuggled across the borders of complacency the most outrageous contraband; lesbianism, cross-dressing, female power, but as much as that, and to me more than that, she smuggled her language alive past the checkpoints of propriety” (AO 50). Winterson is emphasising the concept of borders as negative and is praising the writer who transgresses the rule of propriety. When critics attempt to contain writers by placing them in a category the art and language of a text is given a reductive reading.

The time of writing and particular writing strategies employed in *Orlando* and *Sexing the Cherry* should place them respectively in the modern and postmodern camp and this could imply a divergence between them. The solipsism inherent in romantic love, and the need for an individual to love another individual, also implies that Winterson is enamoured with the modernist understanding of subject status. By reading these novels as using certain techniques, rather than labelling them as ‘modern’ or ‘postmodern’, it is possible to avoid consigning them into neat enclosures.

Both *Orlando* and *Sexing the Cherry* separately smuggle concerns about identity, love, and what it is ‘to be’, across time. Love is a driving force that propels both narratives through time and across gender barriers. Love is used by both authors as a metaphor for discussing identity and they demonstrate that love can be translated to alter time and perceptions. When love is seen as a metaphor it is possible that it can also be a weapon for questioning the metaphysics of being and subsequently the

hierarchies in gender divisions. What is remarkable is that both Woolf and Winterson manage this whilst also continuing to have reverence for the hierarchy that underpins transcendence.

Jordan and Orlando are overtly comparable when they assume different identities. Jordan wants to find his dancing princess Fortunata and because of love he dresses as a woman. His new clothes assist him in realising what it feels like to be a member of the opposite sex. He goes undercover ostensibly to find his love, but continues “as a woman” whilst working on a fish stall (*S* 31). He felt like a “traveller in a foreign country” in his petticoats and experiences ‘being’ a woman (*S* 31). Orlando, after the age of thirty, when he becomes she, also begins to realise the effect gendered clothing has on others and the self when she notices the “penalties and the privileges of her position” (108). Intrinsic to both characters at these two moments is their consciousness of difference and awareness of others through the veil of female clothing. They both traverse the external barrier that has maintained oppositional gendered thinking.

Jordan’s role-playing necessitates a re-evaluation of his hierarchical position as a man. At this stage, Jordan is not so much questioning the metaphysics of being as reaching the first stage in the process where he is realising the false prioritisation that Western thinking traditionally allows males and masculinity. Whilst dressed as a woman he is given a list to teach ‘him’ what men are like, and this helps him to appreciate the material polarisation of the sexes (*S* 32). The “conspiracy of women” shocks Jordan. The only means he has to recognise this ‘conspiracy’ is in his willingness to transform and to appear to be a woman (*S* 32). Because he is spying the narrative is able to assert through his disguised body the ‘true’ polarity caused by humanist infighting. Doan usefully refers to Jordan’s cross-dressing thus: “Such a

strategy is exceedingly advantageous for it permits a plethora of insights hitherto unavailable” (151). His flight at the end of this chapter, which is aided by seagulls, mimics the frustration caused by the death-dealing binaries. In taking him away the birds give him a freedom from the present and from material concerns.

Jordan continues to dress in his disguise as though he is a secret agent who has crossed over into double agency. He appears to have become intrigued enough by the opposite sex to go beyond the original necessity of finding Fortunata. Love is his original motive but this is almost forgotten. It is because of love that Jordan is able to travel beyond his expectations. It helps him to see the masculine error of his ways. When the novel moves forward to ‘some years later’ and the nineteen-eighties’ version of *Dog-Woman* appears her voice becomes Jordan’s especially when thinking about time: “There are so many fairy stories about someone who falls asleep for a little while and wakes up to find himself in a different time. Outwardly nothing is changing for me, but inwardly I am not always here, sitting by a rotting river. I can still escape” (*S* 126). This echoing of a woman by a man across the centuries implies double agency again, particularly with the strategic use of Jordan acting as a spy. It also moves the narrative far away from saying that gender identity is fixed by biology.

Double agency is also evident when Orlando first glimpses Sasha. He sees the clothes and cannot tell if his object of desire is male or female, but is nevertheless filled with curiosity (*Orlando* 26). Jordan performs the act of crossing the great divide into ‘being’ the woman and Orlando thinks it. Love is the original impetus for both and gives them a freedom to break the seemingly fixed rules of heterosexuality and dressing according to one’s assigned gender.

Art Objects states that *Orlando*’s biographical format offers the reader, “the invitation to believe” (*AO* 71). It invites the reader to believe that this piece of fiction

is authentic, a true story. Whilst destabilising this binary of true and false *Orlando* also has a sharpened, political edge that emphasises the materiality of women's past oppressions. The crinoline for example is, for Orlando, an emblem of the restrictions that women had to endure in the nineteenth century. It is not the sole means used to oppress women but it is a symbol of difference. Rachel Bowlby in *Feminist Destinations* also focuses on the theme of clothing in *Orlando* and sees the novel's title as promoting a vacillation between surface (clothing) and identity in this inventive reading of the title: "or/and (and/or) and/or" (44). Bowlby appears to opt for just one reading eventually though as is apparent in the following excerpt: "It was in the change in Orlando herself that dictated her choice of a woman's dress and of a woman's sex" (46). In this example Bowlby is putting a stop to the vacillation in favour of stasis and in so doing she fails to embrace the full potential of undecidability. Movement appears to be fine according to Bowlby, so long as it can be decided that it is either clothes or identity that make Orlando.

By stabilising the metaphoric into the realistic Bowlby has halted the performativity of *Orlando*. The "simple fact" that the biographer claims Orlando is a woman is interpreted as 'fact' and overrides the performance of gender which is inherent in the novel (97). The invitation to believe has apparently been accepted. In *Art Objects* Winterson recognises that *Orlando* "is metaphor, is transformation, is art" (66), and is concerned with its movement beyond the literal. Jordan and Orlando negate stasis and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* may be allied with both novels because of the concern all three texts have with understanding identity as a performance and a construction. Clothing is a metaphor for Jordan and Orlando and it demonstrates how fixity is an illusion. Stasis is overridden by the prefix 'trans', and a list of words may be added to describe the concerns of *Sexing the Cherry*, *Orlando*

and *Gender Trouble*, for example: transformation, transgression and transportation. The idea of crossing is exemplified by the cross-dressing motif and by the Romance.

Butler's interpretation of gender undermines the belief in having to decide:

Because there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalises nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without these acts, there would be no gender at all. (*Gender* 140)

Doan also analyses *Sexing the Cherry* in relation to *Gender Trouble* and offers the convincing argument that it is the grafting metaphor, rather than Jordan's cross-dressing, that comes closest to Butler's search for the site where categories of sex can become displaced. Doan understands the idea of grafting as unlocking the binary: "The transnatural practice of grafting does not circumvent, eliminate, or destroy the original (gendered) biological matter that produces a hybrid, and as a result the process that makes an "other" ultimately registers the inceptive binarism as excess, as redundancy" (152). Doan continues this point in relation to Jordan's and Jeanette's adoptive status and this agrees with my earlier discussion in the first chapter of this thesis, where the bonds of love are often understood as artificial in Winterson's work:

The fact that Jordan - himself adopted (like Jeanette and Winterson herself) and thus in a sense created without a seed - chooses to experiment on the cherry, an emblem of virginity and a euphemism for the hymen, anticipates a solution well beyond the fruit metaphor or the superficial "peel" of cross-dressing; it is a solution that anticipates a different order to supplant the old. By imagining nascency emerging from virginity created and sustained outside binaries, outside of the seed, Winterson nips the old order in the bud before it even begins;... (153)

This escape from binaries is continued in Winterson's next novel, with the gender-unspecified narrator. When Fortunata cuts the rope which holds her in order to move on, there is another enactment of escape and continually morphing identity that Butler exposes (*S* 21). Fortunata can never rest and is afraid of tiring and becoming static. To live is to continue cutting the rope (or thread) and this is what Jeanette discovers in *Oranges* as she separates from her mother.

There is a repetition of this theme of cutting in *Art Objects*, where Winterson understands the art of writing as comparable to Fortunata's existence: the ceilings are floors and it is necessary to cut the tie which holds you (*AO* 161). In addition to this comparison with a writer, Fortunata may also be explained as a trope for the reader of *Orlando* and *Sexing the Cherry*. The rope has to be severed to be able to continue reading these novels and to be able to suspend foundational belief in the subject. As with *Oranges*, it is an act of love to cut the cord and to continue moving. Attaching a realist interpretation to Orlando's and Fortunata's characterisation is similar to a humanist position, which would fix the dancer's feet to the floor, just as the dancing princesses' father desires when he wants them to marry. This is a form of control and does not allow for independence or for the severing of the tie between parent and child (*S* 48).

Marilyn Farwell, however, warns against entirely cutting off the humanist connection: "A feminism that is wary of essentialism and that privileges gender undecidability risks not being able to speak its feminism; in fact, it risks its own version of re-marking the same by not acknowledging gender difference" (72). This point is salient, especially as Farwell moves on to discuss the problems associated with forgetting about the hidden male subject. The solution to Farwell's worries may be a continual vigilance concerning the effects of patriarchal rule, and this is evident

in *Sexing the Cherry* and *Orlando* in the guise of the dangers of falling in love. Love is never easily accepted in any of Winterson's novels. It hurts in the form of Louise's sick body in *Written on the Body*, and it may imprison as seen in Henri's incarceration on the Rock in *The Passion*. Love is the essential ingredient to both *Sexing the Cherry* and *Orlando*. This applies in the search by Jordan and in the abstinence from relationships by Fortunata and Dog-Woman. Love is ever present for Orlando. It appears in his and her life because of Sasha, and in the avoidance of love for fear of being hurt again. Omnipotent love is possibly the sugar-coated pill for both novelists when they offer a performative version of identity. If performance is unpalatable for a liberal humanist audience, romantic love may assist in its acceptance.

Jordan brings the sisterhood of the princesses to the reader. His imagination is used to explore their lives and to recount how love has been used against them as a weapon. Lynne Pearce's *Reading Dialogics* also compares *Sexing the Cherry* with *Orlando* and understands Jordan as a means for exploring the gender of imagination: "Like many of Winterson's characters, he is uncomfortable with the binaristic sex-stereotyping of masculine/feminine and his quest for Fortunata is clearly a quest not only for love but also for his own feminine 'supplement'" (179). Pearce's insight is useful when considering how love, for Jordan, is connected inextricably to questioning his sex and its association with dominance. With this argument it is possible that Farwell's fears of hidden male subjects may be calmed. Jordan may be understood as a strategy for crossing the gender divide. He transports the reader, with his critical male voice, to disturb another parallel land where patriarchal rule seeks to use love as a means of oppression.

Jordan wants to be like other men, but also desires to be more like his mother (S 101). This implies a concern in the narrative for a wish to escape gender stereotypes

and a desire to belong. His stories are an escape from the present and highlight the sense of loss that accompanies impossible desires. These desires are impossible because by definition they cannot be sated. They are also in tension with each other. Rosemary Jackson's *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* argues that fantasies help to reveal what lies in the unconscious. The following offers an explanation of Jordan's journeys as revealing the tensions implicit in his unconscious desires: "Literary fantasies, expressing unconscious drives, are particularly open to psychoanalytic readings, and frequently show in graphic forms a tension between the 'laws of human society' and the resistance of the unconscious mind to those laws" (R. Jackson 6). Jordan resists being overwhelmed by his assigned gender role in wanting to be like his mother. Identification is problematic for him when he questions being male and masculine. He is drawn as a sympathetic male figure and resembles Handel in *Art and Lies* and Henri in *The Passion* as all three characters struggle with the roles assigned to them.

Jordan's typical heroism is evident when he finds the pineapple and brings it back to the King. It is typical when using traditional masculine values as a paradigm. This heroism is diminished when the future Jordan sees a painting by Uccello and notices that the person who brought the fruit is missing. This instance correlates with how the original Jordan's discovery of the pineapple is not actually described in *Sexing the Cherry*. By underplaying what would be a traditionally noteworthy historical moment, historical fact is forgotten in favour of Jordan's rumination over his fancied meeting with Fortunata, the woman who does not exist. He prefers to tell a love story rather than boast about his conquest of a land that is epitomised by the new fruit. Consequently, a new type of masculinity is offered with this fruit. This is emphasised

when remembering that Jordan not only wishes he was like other men, but also identifies with his mother.

Dog-Woman also performs masculine and feminine roles. Her “frailty of heart” suggests femininity and her murderous violence suggests masculinity (*S* 40). These traits are similar to those inherent in the genderless narrator of *Written on the Body*, but with Dog-Woman there is no dispute over her biological sex. She is sexed by her name and found to be female, as is the cherry in the title, but she still defies the boundaries of sex classification. Her celibacy hints at neuter and it is a point of sympathy for the romantically inclined reader that this character is literally too large to enjoy love.

As well as being a narrative grounding voice to Jordan’s dreams of love, Dog-Woman also acts as an embodiment of physicality. Her corporeality is impossible to avoid and is as noticeable as her feats of strength. The power of her body is emphasised continuously as though to disavow a purely poststructuralist understanding of her. Her clitoris is as large as an orange, and the flesh of fruit (and nature) are allied to her body. She is too large to be a sex object and her disguise for the king’s trial consists of sitting in a wheelbarrow in rags, rather than partaking of the chance to cross-dress like Jordan and Tradescant. Her excessiveness is comparable to Jordan’s merging of past, present and future in his mind, because she typifies the romancing of certainty.

Elizabeth Grosz’s understanding of corporeality, in *Space, Time, and Perversion* is helpful in analysing Dog-Woman’s mass. (Incidentally Grosz’s title would be an apt subtitle for both *Orlando* and *Sexing the Cherry*.) Grosz is useful generally for bolstering a defence of poststructuralism in the face of material feminism and further to this Grosz also tries to move beyond a purely theoretical approach to understanding

and refiguring the body for discussion. Grosz is not satisfied with reading the body only in non-dualist terms. She prefers instead for it to be reconceived in “specifically sexed terms” (*Space* 84). Grosz’s turn to the body should not be confused with previous feminist writings, such as those aligned with egalitarianism and social constructionism, which she outlines in *Volatile Bodies*. It is more fruitful to ally Grosz with the feminists of sexual difference because, “these feminists thus do not evoke a precultural, presocial, or prelinguistic pure body but a body as social and discursive object, a body bound up in the order of desire, signification, and power” (*Volatile* 19). Dog-Woman’s body is her identity as others recognise her and apart from being a comic outlet for the narrative, for example when she sees fear in men’s eyes at her bulk, her body is positioned to act as a symbol of her strength. It figuratively demonstrates her power, even though she has a frail heart.

Dog-Woman’s future self is bullied for being overweight and her mass is codified by those around her into negativity. Christy Burns’ comparative study of Woolf and Winterson recognises that Winterson is freer to express social concerns, and regards the seventeenth century Dog-Woman as a role model of sorts: “The fantasy of Dog-Woman provides a *telos*, an inspiring image of some future potential self, both for Winterson’s contemporary character and for her reader” (369). The social pressure on the female body is juxtaposed with a past which gave it power. “Time 2: They are cat-calling the girl as she comes out of school. They tell her she smells, that she’s too fat, too tall” (*S* 82). Perhaps these bullies should have listened to Rabelais in the Author’s Prologue to *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (volume one) where he advises the reader to not just look at the outside of the box or the book, but to look inside (4).

As both Woolf and Winterson’s novels shift through the centuries they question the notion of progression in the twentieth century. In *Orlando* the damp that descends

with the nineteenth century and the repetition of time suggested in the imagery of the buses, which appear to be like the floating ice from centuries before, implies a less than benign look to the future. The constraints of the nineteenth and twentieth century are emphasised through the female body. Constraints imply a negotiable stasis, as Grosz explains: “The body can be regarded as a kind of hinge or threshold: it is placed between a psychic or lived interiority and a more sociopolitical exteriority that produces interiority through the inscription of the body’s outer surface” (*Space* 33). Grosz’s allusion to the hinge in terms of the body allows for more than the docility of the disciplined body offered by Foucault, but also does not retreat to humanist feminism.

Orlando describes the passing of linear time as restrictive but impossible to stop. When Orlando feels violently assaulted by the chimes of the clock, time becomes the enemy (216). There are echoes here of Big Ben’s repetition throughout *Mrs Dalloway*, and when the future Dog-Woman is insulted because of her weight the myth that links linear time to progress is also questioned.

Woolf and Winterson do not use the past in a nostalgic sense. They employ it to demonstrate the continued oppression of women through the objectification of the body. These writers also disturb the concept of the static body. Dog-Woman’s future self gains strength from the past but also lives in the present. Dog-Woman and Orlando (as she) are not Utopian bodies, but bodies that are shaped and inscribed by the present. Essentiality is discarded in favour of a more Foucauldian disciplined body, but the docility is avoided by the hinge motif. The hinge allows for agency whereas a docile body implies total subjugation.

Pykett also notes the allusiveness in *Sexing the Cherry* to *Orlando* but concludes by insinuating that Winterson separates her writing too far from political concerns:

“Perhaps she needs to close her Eliot and re-read her Woolf (*A Room of One’s Own*, *Three Guineas* and the essays) and Carter” (60). Pykett, Moore, and Doan have all at times questioned Winterson’s commitment to politics. Lynne Pearce has also suggested that *Sexing the Cherry* distances itself too far from materiality in a comparative reading with Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. However, as Lucie Armitt point out, in *Contemporary Women’s Fiction and the Fantastic*, these two texts are essentially concerned with different themes. *Beloved* is necessarily more concerned with materiality because it is about slavery and *Sexing the Cherry* is not (38). In addition, although a novel surely does not have to be political to be worthy of analysis, it still remains that Winterson does engage with materiality to a certain degree. Even if just reading Jordan’s equivocations over the personal and impersonal, over feminine or masculine, this novel disturbs traditional, dominant expectations of art, love and sexuality. By being so connected to modernist predecessors, such as Woolf and Eliot, it may also hold true that twentieth-century dominant expectations of art are simply being reaffirmed by Winterson rather than challenged. If this is the case then Winterson may be read as attempting to find her niche in a tradition of literature, rather than breaking with the past. The impossibility of ever being entirely free of the anxiety of influence has already been argued by Bloom in the text of the same name, and a measured reading of Winterson must recognise that she, like other writers, is a part of a tradition. To judge her work solely on the level of her political engagement is, however, reductive.

Dog-Woman’s future self becomes sick because of pollution. Her hallucinations are later linked to the mercury but this is also what gives her power. Her body is not now an object to her (as Grosz also proposes about one’s own body) and it begins to give her strength. This Dog-Woman refuses to forget the material present, but because of this her health suffers. With eco-feminism, concern for others, and love

the present and future are juxtaposed within a feminism of sexual difference within the one character. A fractured rather than homogenised view of gender and the body is consequently offered up.

The leap of imagination in time and space in *Sexing the Cherry* avoids the realism of the accepted life span. Corporeality disrupts the expectation of the future and progress because it breaks up linear time. When the fairy tale of the city (where love is banned) is added to this fracturing, the body as living is seen to require love as an essence. Love transcends time and should transcend restrictions that are placed on the freedom to love. Disciplining laws on bodies in the City are eventually discarded even though the penalty for loving is death (*S* 78). It is as though, eventually, this parable of the loveless city is also a framework for Winterson's bodies. The body would die rather than live without love. This is in spite of the implications of sexlessness that are often associated with celibacy, or theorising.

In this City, the corrupt modern associations of acceptable love are representatives of forbidden totems for the love museum, such as the red roses, stale sugar hearts and bad poems (*S* 77). In conjunction with this, and in contrast, *Art Objects* states that "literature is not a museum it is a living thing" (*AO* 176). Love's inseparable association with literature and language is conveyed by reading *Art Objects* alongside *Sexing the Cherry*. Love and literature should not be in a museum, according to these two texts by Winterson, even if love's Western symbols are clichés. Words and emotions should be set free. Two lovers are suffocated in the church in the City of Words because the lead on the roof would not release their words. This is a criticism of organised religion for not recognising emotions. It is also an example of how language for Winterson is living and needs air to breathe.

In conclusion, *Sexing the Cherry* offers an interpretation of love as an ideological trap whilst simultaneously idealising it. It contests the version offered by organised religion, as in the metaphor of the suffocating church, but never denies the emotion. Winterson is maintaining the same perspective used in *The Passion* and *Oranges* by continuing to claim that love is transcendent. This claim is extended in all of her later novels.

Jordan, who mimics the style of a romanticist, pursues the vision of true love even though he is aware of the fictionality of his dream. In addition, here lies the paradox that occurs when Winterson writes about love. Love is recognised as a construction, a learned emotion, but it is nonetheless paramount. Winterson is influenced by various literary movements such as romanticism, modernism and postmodernism and contains this eclectic approach in such a way that she evades categorisation. The postmodern devices, which Doan signposts and which are quoted at the beginning of this chapter, are clearly visible as is the relationship between *Sexing the Cherry* and *Orlando*. Love is the constant that Winterson uses to destabilise fixity such as gender and identity. Because it is a constant there is also the tacit implication that this is a timeless emotion and this has the effect of de-politicising her art.

Chapter Four

Undying Love

Written on the Body

Death and the fear of separation from a loved one are the two main components of *Written on the Body* that are concentrated on in this chapter. These themes have already been employed to a lesser extent in earlier Winterson novels. In *Oranges*, for example, Jeanette is concerned with the impending separation from her mother. Death is explored in *The Passion* and, as its title suggests, love in this work is intrinsically connected to suffering. Jordan's search for Fortunata in *Sexing the Cherry* is driven by the fear of loss and the wish to fulfil desires. *Written on the Body* has, though, a more developed examination of loss, and the fear of it, than has appeared in Winterson's earlier works: death and fear, certainty and uncertainty, characterise this novel.

Nicci Gerard's review of *Art and Lies* identifies a downward trajectory in Winterson's writing from *Sexing the Cherry* onwards and associates this with Winterson's movement away from realism:

In her earlier novels, her rhapsodic prose was anchored to a narrative. But by *Sexing the Cherry* she had started to unshackle herself from realism, and in *Written on the Body* the fervent, keening love story was etherealised by having a narrator with no specified gender: love was made transcendent, depoliticised and gutted of credibility. (7)

Gerard's comments are symptomatic of the turning tide against Winterson's writing. This began in earnest with the publication of *Written on the Body* and continued with *Art and Lies* and *Gut Symmetries*. Generally, reviews of *The World and Other Places*

and *The Powerbook* mark Winterson's shift back into critical favour. Gerard's disappointment with *Art and Lies* appears to have its roots in *Sexing the Cherry*'s 'unshackling from realism', as though this marks a decline in value. Gerard is correct in tracing a change in emphasis in Winterson's style but Winterson has never committed herself to being a realist novel writer. Marilyn Farwell writes about *Sexing the Cherry* and *Written on the Body* more positively: "What I find most interesting about Jeanette Winterson is her combination of conventional narrative form and postmodern dissonance" (194). This reference counterbalances Gerard's apparent need for realism and validates Winterson's experimentations.

Gerard's views of *Written on the Body* are noteworthy for highlighting the unspecified gender of the narrator. I agree that this device has the effect of constructing the love in the story as being universal and transcendent, and could be consequently read as making the story apolitical. Gerard appears to believe that Winterson should be more overtly materialist, and implies that breaking from this is a sin against good novel writing as this diminishes its 'credibility'. Ironically, when read as a novel about love and loss, *Written on the Body* is credible and political although this argument is unnecessarily defending Winterson's work against Gerard's argument, rather than negating Gerard's value system. Nicholas Lezard reviewed *Written on the Body* when it was published in paperback. He was guarded in his praise, but also deflated the harsher criticisms:

From the way some reviewers reacted when this came out, you'd have thought Winterson had written a treatise in favour of disembowelling kittens, when all she had done was fail to maintain her normally high standards. This is a giddy, adolescent book, but then you could argue that that's what love is all about. (14)

The giddiness Lezard alludes to, but does not specify, may be found in the sections where the narrator discusses past love affairs. These are comic outlets that act as relief to the later stages of the novel when the narrator discovers his/her lover Louise has leukaemia.

This thesis interprets *Written on the Body* as defying Gerard's, and to a lesser extent Lezard's, negativity and instead understands this novel as an investigation of what it is to lose a loved one. Loss is defined in the text as encompassing the breakdown of a relationship as well as a loved one dying. *Written on the Body* depends on a framework of uncertainty and certainty, which is inimical to the fear of loss. In deference to this framework the same is used here to investigate this novel's treatment of love and loss. The unshackling from realism, which Gerard decries, is the vehicle by which Winterson exposes the uncertainty that is written into the insecurity of loving somebody. *Written on the Body* weighs against this lack of fixity with the certainty of loss, which is one of the few remaining certainties in light of poststructuralist theory, and the desire for certainty and security when loving another. Love both inspires uncertainty and yet is once more the constant certain feature in another Winterson novel.

Uncertainty

The first line of *Written on the Body* asks, "why is the measure of love loss?" (*W* 9), and the last paragraph begins "this is where the story starts..." (*W* 190). The spiral structure that Winterson claims for *Oranges* (*O* xiii) is apparent in *Written on the Body* as the story almost circles back on itself. The novel has Louise at its centre as the narrator measures the effects of losing her. Because it is never stated explicitly

whether Louise dies or not, the narrative spirals away from her presence rather than abruptly leaving her behind.

Louise disappears without a trace, similarly to the narrator when s/he finds out about her illness. In the penultimate paragraph Louise's face appears in the doorway and it is left uncertain whether she has gone forever or not. In the same way that it is impossible to 'solve' the narrator's gender, the presence or absence of the dying beloved is equally deconstructed.

The uncertain aspect of *Written on the Body* is heightened when Louise is compared to nineteenth-century literary heroines in the novel, such as Jane Eyre (who is also a key figure in *Oranges*) and Madame Bovary. Her fictional status is heightened when the narrator fails to track her down after returning to their old haunts: "I couldn't find her. I couldn't even get near finding her. It's as if Louise never existed, like a character in a book. Did I invent her?" (*W* 189). If there is nothing outside of the text and love is a discourse, which is constantly implied within this text, Louise is as much of an invention as the narrator and the reader. As one in a pair of lovers Louise is also the image of a beloved that the narrator has created. The idea of the lover creating the beloved has been broached already in this thesis in relation to *Sexing the Cherry*, and this concept is continued in *Written on the Body*. If there is nothing outside the text, language constructs love, death and identity. The lover and the beloved are two more intertexts in the discourse of love. As Marianne Børch states, Louise also has a script, as with her "'accidental' encounter" with the narrator when she uses Emma Hamilton's ploy of wetting her dress to attract a lover (50). This is a reminder that the narrator does not have sole control of the narrative. Louise's script is also emblematic of how *Written on the Body* defies the

individualisation of power. Instead it describes how the lover and beloved play parts in a relationship.

The title, *Written on the Body*, takes not only a sideways view of *écriture féminine*, but gestures more strongly towards the act of tattooing; it is, after all, 'written on' not writing the body. Writing and love are a means to inflict pain and are certain permanent reminders that are alluded to metaphorically: "The moulds of your teeth are easy to see under my shirt but the L that tattoos me on the inside is not visible to the naked eye" (*W* 118). By correlating this with Derrida's 'The Postcard' it is possible to see that the narrator of *Written on the Body* is deconstructing the presence/absence hierarchy, and writing now shifts above speech. The binary of presence and absence makes the writing process a form of killing, and Derrida links this to loving the addressee. In Derrida's fragments of the postcard it is never clear who is writing or who the addressee is, except 'my love'. In Winterson's novel it is never clear who has tattooed whom with their love, or even if it is the lover or beloved that is dictating this story, as the narrator demands, "never unfold too much, tell the whole story. I didn't know that Louise would have reading hands. She has translated me into her own book." (*W* 89). The narrator writes Louise a leaving letter and the writer of Derrida's postcard echoes this: "You will recognise nothing yourself, you will feel nothing, and when you read even I will pass unnoticed. After this final murder we will be more alone than ever, I will continue to love you, living, beyond you" ('Postcard' 508). Who is killing whom and who is writing whom are the unanswerable questions inherent in 'The Postcard' and at times *Written on the Body*; is Louise dead or alive, and is it cowardice or courage on the narrator's part to leave her? The narrator's letter is less abstract than these issues, but it is also aware of the power of discourse, for example: "Your handprints are all over my body. Your flesh is

my flesh. You deciphered me and now I am plain to read. The message is a simple one; my love for you. I want you to live” (*W* 106).

Tantalisingly, Louise appears to have physically returned at the end of the narrative, as she is “warm” (*W* 190), but more plausibly her re-emergence may be read as a theoretical trace that can never be fully erased. The reading that sits most easily with the novel’s evidence is that Louise exemplifies that which cannot be forgotten and is the Other that persistently returns in mourning: “What peace is there for us whose best love cannot return them even for a day? I raise my head to the door and think I will see you in the frame. I know it is your voice in the corridor but when I run outside the corridor is empty. There is nothing I can do that will make any difference. The last word was yours” (*W* 156). Spivak’s ‘Love Me, Love My Ombre, Elle’ explains how Freud in ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ suggests that successful mourning, “accepts the lost object as lost” (23). Along with Derrida, Spivak disputes Freud’s reasoning. I believe that the narrator of *Written on the Body* is likewise unwilling to accept this loss in his/her grieving for Louise. Spivak’s disagreement with Freud helps to explain the narrator’s sense of endless loss in gendered terms: “According to the abyssal structure named woman, who is also the lost object par excellence, there can be no proper and self-identical acceptance of loss” (Spivak 23).

In a dialogue with Richard Kearney, Derrida expresses an interest in writers who “make the limits of language tremble” (*Dialogues* 112). This may be applied to Winterson, especially when considering how *Written on the Body* undermines the metaphysics of being. The narrator’s gender is after all never specified. S/he is both and neither and may be read as the Dasein in Derrida’s ‘Geschlecht’. Derrida borrows Dasein from Heidegger and amplifies its usage. He emphasises how it is not a negative term: “If Dasein as such belongs to neither of the two sexes, that does not

mean its being is deprived of sex. On the contrary: here one must think of a predifferential, or rather a predual, sexuality – which does not necessarily mean unitary, homogeneous, or undifferentiated...” (‘Geschlecht’ 387). With this application the narrator is still a sexual being rather than a neuter, and may also be read as a non-concept that tries to escape categories or marginalisation.¹ Love remains transcendent in *Written on the Body* nevertheless. The deconstruction of the narrator’s gender and Louise’s presence heightens the importance of love as it remains a constant certainty in Winterson’s work. Love, it appears, is beyond the forces of deconstruction.

Julie Kristeva, in *Tales of Love*, offers another analysis of the intricacies of the combination of ‘I’ and loving and this offers another framework for understanding *Written on the Body*’s narrator. She argues that “love is the time and space in which ‘I’ assumes the right to be extraordinary” (5). The complacent regard of the knowable self and knowable love appears to be brought together by time and space co-ordinates, but the chart is not plotted logically because of the word ‘extraordinary’. The ‘I’ who addresses the reader in *Written on the Body*, ‘assumes the right to be extraordinary’ specifically because his/her gender is not defined. Conceptions of a straightforward linear story are dismantled as the narrative proceeds because of the narrator’s unknowable gender. Assumptions based on humanism, which tend towards fixing meaning, are time and again exploded by the ‘I’ who never fully exposes him or her self.

When Louise’s return at the end of *Written on the Body* is read as a fictional strategy she represents how in mourning the expression of grief becomes a means to unlock false binaries. The division between life and death is already deconstructed

¹ This is a ‘non-concept’ in that it does not have an opposite. Understanding this narrator as genderless is not universally agreed upon by Winterson critics, as Lucie Armitt points out in *Contemporary Women’s Fiction and the Fantastic*: “For others, myself included, this claim for genderlessness fails to ring true” (116). Armitt aligns her reading with Nicole Ward Jouve’s and argues that this narrator is female.

when the narrator pours him/herself into reading the anatomy books as s/he embraces the dying Louise in words. Wolfgang and Margaret Stroebe in *Bereavement and Health* argue that the most surprising feature of ‘normal’ grief is the opposing nature of some of the symptoms: “We find anger and apathy, weight loss and weight gain, preoccupation with or suppression of memories of the deceased, and removal versus treasuring their possessions” (8). This behaviour is then unquantifiable, and appears to act like the process of deconstruction. Heather Nunn notices how the narrator’s undecidability in grief is evident, which supports this perspective: “The oscillation between fascination with and horror of, otherness and difference, the wish to know and the fear of being engulfed, are all in the narrator’s love and dread of the diseased Louise” (25). The Stroebees stress that there is not a correct way to grieve. This is apparent in the narrator’s failure to come to terms with Louise’s imminent death by visiting cancer wards and becoming acquainted with her illness. The ‘true’ depiction of what it is to lose someone you love can be neither contained nor barely described according to the Stroebees, because accuracy depends on having consistent behaviour patterns to follow. *Written on the Body* also understands the impossibility of containing mourning:

‘You’ll get over it...’ It’s the clichés that cause the trouble. To lose someone you love is to alter your life for ever. You don’t get over it because ‘it’ is the person you loved. The pain stops, there are new people, but the gap never closes. How could it? The particularness of someone who mattered enough to grieve over is not made anodyne by death. This hole in my heart is in the shape of you and no-one else can fit it. Why would I want them to? (*W* 155)

The narrator also describes death as, “the argument ending in mid-air” (*W* 155), emphasising again the irresolution that death leaves for the bereaved. His/her further point that, “death reduces us to the baffled logic of a small child” insists on explaining how debilitating loss is for the survivor (*W* 156).

This quotation also opens the way for mentioning Freud’s fort-da model in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. This model is sympathetic to *Written on the Body*’s relationship with loss up to a point, but because the narrator never manages to accept Louise’s absence this novel refutes both ‘Mourning and Melancholia’s and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*’s suggestions that loss can be mastered. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* the absent mother is the first loss and the one that the child tries to control. Through repetition loss becomes familiar and accepted according to Freud: “As the child passes over from the passivity of the experience to the activity of the game, he hands on the disagreeable experience to one of his playmates and in this way revenges himself on a substitute” (*Beyond* 16). The narrator’s revenge comes about in repeating the tragedy of Louise’s impending death to the reader, as s/he attempts to take charge of events by repeating and circling back to the lost beloved. That the narrator never manages to come to terms with this loss indicates a break, however, with Freud’s optimism. Elisabeth Bronfen, in *Over Her Dead Body*, reads the fort/da game as positing the maternal body as the site of death, and it “brings notions of human mortality into play” (32). It also aims to master loss and the re-emergence of Louise at the end of the novel suggests this may (or may not?) have been achieved.

Contextually, the narrator has been grieving for Louise. The loss the narrator measures love by is the grief s/he experiences in the latter part of the novel. There is no autopsy or funeral for Louise but this is unimportant because mourning has already formed her into the lost loved object before her fleeting reappearance. Her face in the

doorway could be read as one of those glimpses one has of a dead loved one, which the narrator refers to earlier in the novel in relation to a dead friend: “When I recovered from her death in the crudest sense I started to see her in the streets, always fleetingly, ahead of me, her back to me, disappearing into the crowd. I am told this is common” (*W* 155).

The fear of loss is not restricted to bereavement in *Written on the Body*. Before the narrator is told about Louise’s illness the narrative ricochets between the development of their romance and the disastrous relationships the narrator falls into before meeting her. These act as both comic ‘giddy’ outlets and as forms to represent why the narrator is cautious about commitment. S/he confesses to being a Lothario, but close reading of the exploits with Inge, Bathsheba and Crazy Frank reveals the narrator as the one who is disappointed and rejected by the lovers. S/he appears to be another Winterson character that is in love with being in love. The narrator’s previous lovers, apart from Jacqueline, all end the relationships with him/her. Losing a lover through illness is the culmination of all these descriptions of being let down by the love and romance that the narrator offers.

Certainty

Loss, and the fear of losing somebody, are the measures of the narrator’s love for Louise. This novel is another Wintersonian romantic love story that thrives on separation and the fear of separation to magnify its poignancy. This poignancy arises from the subtext’s desire for the unification of lovers whose sexual love for each other can continue eternally. The narrator admits that when s/he was wearing the dancing shoes instead of the slippers s/he “was deep in the slop-bucket of romance” (*W* 21).

When s/he settles down temporarily with Jacqueline s/he has stopped searching for the romantic dream:

I had done to death the candles and champagne, the roses, the dawn breakfasts, the transatlantic telephone calls and the impulsive plane rides. I had done all of that to escape the cocoa and hot water bottles. And I had done all of that because I thought the fiery furnace must be better than central heating. I suppose I couldn't admit that I was as trapped in a cliché every bit as redundant as my parents' roses round the door. I was looking for the perfect coupling; the never-sleep non-stop mighty orgasm. (*W* 21)

Perfect coupling is the transcendental, unattainable desire at the heart of *Written on the Body* and this hope is what lies behind the narrator's criticism of marriage, which s/he describes as "the flimsiest weapon against desire" (*W* 78).

Written on the Body does not so much resist marriage, as react against the false certainty of the marriage vow that is the cornerstone of normative heterosexual relations. Love, rather than the institution of marriage, is regarded as pure.² The narrator of *Written on the Body* is in favour of the paradoxically impossible honesty of perfection:

When I say 'I will be true to you' I am drawing a quiet space beyond the reach of other desires. No-one can legislate love; it cannot be given orders or cajoled into service. Love belongs to itself, deaf to pleading and unmoved by violence. Love is not something you can negotiate. Love is the one thing stronger than desire and the only proper reason to resist temptation. (*W* 77-78)

² This reverence for love, rather than marriage, is re-asserted in all of Winterson's novels to varying degrees. In chapter six of this thesis there is a more detailed analysis of this thematic separation of love from marriage in relation to *Gut Symmetries*.

Love is esteemed in this reference to the point of it being essentialised. It is separated from laws and commandments, and deconstruction. It is beyond reproach and control. When the narrator claims that “love belongs to itself”, this emotion is revered as though it were a deity or a biological necessity. It is, again, understood as transcendent.

This idolisation of love is magnified when it is compared to the clichés that are self-consciously revealed in the novel. As Børch indicates, *Written on the Body* repeatedly claims that clichés cause the trouble, and the narrator admits that s/he is as trapped in one as much as his/her parents. Winterson still attempts to push past this boundary of signification and does so with the ideal of love. Børch demonstrates how *Written on the Body* uses clichés to indicate how special love is: “In *Written*, she shows how clichés destroy the love they are often invoked to express, and identifies the cause: cliché is prior to individual usage, repetition and iterability being the conditions of its recognisability and use; love, however, is unique” (45). This uniqueness is epitomised by the narrator’s reaction to the impending loss of Louise, the dying love object. The paradox of this novel is encoded in the narrator’s insistence that love can rise above the clichés, yet clichés are constructed by language and, as the novel implies, language constructs reality.

The slippage of meaning in *Written on the Body* fictionalises Louise and makes the narrator’s gender indeterminate. But when circling back to the idea of transcendent love and the narrator’s very ‘real’ grieving for his/her lost Louise the story changes. Another text by Derrida, entitled *The Gift of Death*, examines the individuality of death, which is in keeping with the facet of *Written on the Body* that is individualistic and humanist: “Death is very much that which nobody else can undergo or confront in my place” (*Gift* 41). Here a certainty stops the slippage and there is recognition of the

final loss. With regard to *Written on the Body*, it justifies the narrator's concern for the "irreplaceability" of Louise (*Gift* 41). The narrator's retreat to Yorkshire when s/he leaves Louise, suspends her in the air so that she is still a fiction. The narrator avoids her death as s/he retreats but the mourning of her is inescapable. The certainty of love becomes apparent in the narrator's fixation on his/her lost lover.

Denis de Rougemont describes and prescribes a privileging of passion in Western literature. Winterson tends to depend on this privileging as a narrative device in *Written on the Body*, most obviously because of its acute concern with linking love to death. *The Passion* develops this connection between love and death because of its title and in the horrors of war that Henri delineates. *Written on the Body* extends this focus by having a central, dying heroine. Susana Onega footnotes a similar point in "I'm Telling You Stories, Trust Me", when she claims that *Written on the Body*, "is quite different from [Winterson's] earlier fiction" (147). Onega continues: "In it she abandons her earlier concern with history and story-telling in order to concentrate on "passion"" (147). Onega is overlooking *The Passion's* passion, and forgetting that story-telling is a recurrent self-reflexive feature of Winterson's oeuvre. Onega does, however, saliently note the overwhelming love/death connection in *Written on the Body*. The strategy of using Louise as a central, dying object of desire forces the reader to contemplate passion as untouchably transcendent. This is comparable to de Rougemont's insistent interpretation of passion: "Suffering and understanding are deeply connected; death and self-awareness are in league; and European romanticism may be compared to a man for whom sufferings, and especially the sufferings of love, are a privileged mode of understanding" (51). Within this remit, *Written on the Body* attempts to raise itself above its predecessors as it thrives on the loss of a loved one in order to drive itself forward, and in circles and spirals. The universal, gender-

unspecified narrator also complements de Rougemont's view that in Western literature there is an awarding of sovereignty to the subject of death. We read the narrator as s/he, rather than 'he' or 'she', the narrator appears to proclaim that this novel is above gender differentiation. It is, instead, primarily concerned with the remaining certainties, post-poststructuralism, of life and death. In Winterson's writings love is one more certainty.

The clichés not only clarify by comparison how special love is in *Written on the Body*, but they also offer a haven from passion and the certainty of death. This is evident when Louise cannot be found, and the narrator relates in the present tense how s/he now wants to retreat from passion again: "I am desperately looking the other way so that love won't see me. I want the diluted version, the sloppy language, the insignificant gestures. The saggy armchair of clichés" (*W* 10).³ This wish for safety is also referred to when the narrator forms a relationship with Jacqueline. Jacqueline's appeal lies in her offering the narrator a haven from harm and passion: "I didn't love her and I didn't want to love her and I could not imagine desiring her. These were all points in her favour. I had lately learned that another way of writing FALL IN LOVE is WALK THE PLANK" (*W* 26). Louise disturbs this sanctuary and brings passion back into the novel, and the narrator succumbs to the inevitable love story cliché of falling in love. These clichés help to make time stand still, and almost reverse it, because they are well-worn phrases from the past. Their attractiveness to the narrator, even when in the 'throes of passion' with Louise (which is of course another cliché), is that they make immutability more certain.

³ The 'diluted version' is Winterson's trademark for mass-marketed romance. It is a term that appears pejoratively in *Oranges* and is described as "love's counterfeit" in *Art and Lies* (14). In *Written on the Body* it is a sanctuary from passion, because passion has left him/her in mourning. The diluted version de-sensitises passion and Gail Right is the final protective cliché because, as her name suggests, she is Ms Right and, like Jacqueline, she can offer companionship without pain.

The problem with clichés is that at best they only offer a temporary balm and in *Written on the Body* this is not sufficient. Time is ‘a great healer’ earlier in the novel and Winterson re-writes this over-wrought phrase and replaces it with her own version, “time’s a great deadener” (*W* 189). This has become a cliché in its own right in Winterson’s work, because it is repeated from ‘Deuteronomy’ in *Oranges*. Its repetition and meaning deconstructs the palliative notion that progress as a concept is possible. *Written on the Body* questions the truth of progress in its circular mourning. It suggests that because of the idealisation of Western love, and Winterson is party to this, the narrator is beyond the control of clichés because they aim to console the inconsolable. Winterson contributes to this idealisation of love and furthers it by refusing to allow solace for the mourning narrator.

The fear of losing somebody is lessened slightly in the narrative when there is a postponing of the inevitable. The now clichéd term of seizing the moment plays up to this illusion: “Frighten me? 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” (*W* 18). In practice the lovers wear a watch, but in the sanctum of love time is momentarily forgotten (*W* 18). The chance of love prevails over logic and the certainty of change and Louise is characterised as romantically seizing the moment as she forms a relationship with the narrator without telling him/her about her illness. Paraphrasing Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* she may be understood as taking a circuitous path to death (46). She is taking pleasure in the here and now and postponing their inevitable separation. This corresponds to Jonathan Dollimore’s reading of Freud’s ‘On Transience’ in *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture*, where the poet’s despondency at *carpe diem* is countered by Freud embracing transience as enhancing human life (*Death* 180). When Louise exchanges Elgin for

the narrator she gains a lover who certainly wants to be with her. Whilst her husband prefers the company of prostitutes and baths in porridge, her new lover wants her totally.

Uncertainty

Whilst the motif of *carpe diem* is alluded to in *Written on the Body*, the narrator also warns that this illusion of stasis cannot last: “In silence and darkness we loved each other and as I traced her bones with my palm I wondered what time would do to skin that was so new to me. Could I ever feel any less for this body? Why does ardour pass? Time that withers you will wither me” (*W* 89). The passing of time is remembered by the narrator and this insertion of reality challenges the hope that romantic love holds out. Romantic love promises, as Kierkegaard notes, the illusion of eternity: “Romantic love remains constantly abstract in itself, and if it is able to acquire no external history, death already is lying in wait for it, because its eternity is illusory” (*Either/Or* 88). A friend said to the narrator, “at least your relationship with Louise didn’t fail. It was the perfect romance” (*W* 187). When considering this the narrator asks him/herself if this is so: “Was it? Is that what perfection costs? Operatic heroics and a tragic end?” (*W* 187). It would appear so when reading Winterson’s novels when the uncertainty of romance is used to explore the impact of loss.

The narrator’s insistence on wanting the ‘quiet life’, before his/her relationship with Jacqueline and after Louise has disappeared, is unreliable, therefore uncertain, as s/he relates the first eight lines of Shakespeare’s sonnet 116, and admits to having loved this when younger (*W* 162). S/he amusingly claims to have misunderstood it, but its telling exhibits the narrator’s desire for love in spite of the passing of time and

death. The next four lines of the sonnet, which the narrator omits, uphold the narrator's and *Written on the Body's* love of passion. These next lines honour love and the ideal of constancy, whilst simultaneously exposing the transience of love:

Love's not time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
 Within his bending sickle's compass come;
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
 But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

(*Shakespeare's Sonnets*)

Love is forceful enough in this sonnet to face death, even if the narrator of *Written on the Body* is not. The quoting of this sonnet comes when the narrator leaves Yorkshire and decides to return to London to try to find Louise. The sonnet becomes both a reason for the search and a justification for the novel's preoccupation with love and death.

Irving Singer also quotes a line from this sonnet in *The Pursuit of Love* ("bears it out even to the edge of doom") to exemplify the idea of unconditional love: "Regardless of changes that may occur in that person, and throughout the future alterations in his own feelings or emotions, the lover – or should we say, the true lover? – is thought to accept the beloved till death do them part. That is probably what Shakespeare meant in the sonnet I just cited" (Singer 139). The use of this sonnet by Winterson expands upon the narrator's yearning for true, unconditional love. S/he uses Shakespeare's words as a justification for searching for Louise and as an incentive to return to London to find the beloved. It is a reassurance from the past when facing the uncertain future.

By referring to this sonnet Winterson is relying on earlier, recognisable expressions of love to validate this romantic love story. The narrator derides past

masters such as Renoir and Henry Miller, claiming they have a paintbrush or a pen for a penis, but s/he still relies on the tradition of (phallogocentric) artists to tell his/her story. This marks the ‘postmodern dissonance’ that Farwell enjoys in *Written on the Body*, which has been cited earlier in this chapter. It also exemplifies Winterson’s connection to her literary past. Farwell highlights the textual reminders of John Donne and Shakespeare in this novel, and understands this as reflecting “the impossibility of avoiding romantic clichés and their power when revised” (189). It appears that it is not possible to write about love without the work becoming a cliché. It has all already been said before.

The inability to separate from the past or the present is also written into the jealousy that ties the two lovers together. This extends the metaphor of the thread that joins the mother and daughter in *Oranges*. The rope or thread does not allow for separation and it almost transcends the myth of romance, except that jealousy, romance and passion all have a symbiotic relationship:

Passion is not well bred. Her fingers bit their spot. She would have bound me to her with ropes and had us lie face to face unable to move but move on each other, unable to feel but each other. She would have deprived us of all senses bar the sense of touch and smell. In a blind, deaf and dumb world we could conclude our passion infinitely. To end would be to begin again. Only she, only me. She was jealous but so was I. She was brute with love but so was I. (*W* 162)

Love is the rope that joins the lovers together, but this rope is also described as a death sentence: “In Italy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries a favourite sport was to fasten two fighters together with a strong rope and let them beat each other to death” (*W* 88). These last two passages quoted from *Written on the Body* reflect these

sentiments in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*: "Everything which may be said of me in my relations with the Other applies to him as well. While I attempt to free myself from the hold of the Other, the Other is trying to free himself from mine; while I seek to enslave the Other, the Other seeks to enslave me" (364). It is possible to connect Sartre to Singer's earlier point. They both intertwine with the narrator's belief in love as the burden of unconditional love is revealed. The burden is, it appears, essential to loving another. Attempting to be free from the burden is partly realised in the narrator's escape from Louise. The narrator grows to understand that loving somebody necessarily means being tied to somebody, for better or worse and with or without marriage vows.

The paradox of Sartre's kind of loving is that the lover does not want total enslavement either: "If Tristan and Isolde fall madly in love because of a love potion, they are less interesting. The total enslavement of the beloved kills the love of the lover" (367). This is oppositional to de Rougemont's deification of this Romance. De Rougemont reads this unhappy love story as the crux of Western love stories. Sartre is stressing how the act of totalising love metaphorically means the end of love, whereas Winterson and de Rougemont differ from this perspective. *Written on the Body* falls between Sartre and de Rougemont's claims. It resembles Sartre's understanding when Louise, for example, tells the narrator that she married Elgin because she knew he was safe and that she could control him (*W* 34). This marriage fails because the master Louise breaks the tension between master and slave. Parallels with de Rougemont may be drawn in the total enslavement to mourning that the narrator experiences after leaving Louise. This bondage suggests that *Written on the Body* recognises that 'total enslavement' can heighten the feeling of love for another, and does not kill love as Sartre argues.

The complexity of *Written on the Body*, in relation to the paradoxical aspects of love and enslavement, is characterised by Louise. We combine Louise's explanation for marrying Elgin with the following statement by the narrator, it becomes evident that *Written on the Body* often treads between idealising and demonising love, even if it does eventually idealise it. The following exemplifies the contradiction of love when it is not tender: "I had no dreams to possess you but I wanted you to possess me" (*W* 52). The narrator now merges into Elgin and this is emphasised by Louise telling the narrator to come to her without a past (*W* 54). Elgin and the narrator's subsequent behaviour undercut Louise's dominance, where they become sadists fighting over the spoils, and as Louise separates herself from the triangle. Whilst she is present in the narrative she refuses the stereotype of the beautiful but powerless and objectified woman.

Sartre, Louise and the narrator recognise that the lover requires a "special type of appropriation" (Sartre 367), "the Other is on principle inapprehensible; he flees me when I seek him and possesses me when I flee him" (Sartre 408). The tension is necessary for the love to continue because total enslavement kills love, but this is also love's project. It fuels Louise's and the narrator's jealousy for each other and is also the difference between the narrator's relationship with Jacqueline and with Louise. Sartre's enslaving yet not enslaving love is present in Henri's new freedom on the Rock in *The Passion* because this is also his prison. It is also the paradox that the narrator of *The Powerbook* experiences when not wanting to be alone whilst not wanting to commit to an Other either. The narrator of *Written on the Body* also complies with Sartre's perspective in that choices are available. When s/he is making the decision to dissolve the relationship with Jacqueline, for example, s/he clarifies

how this is not done in bad faith: "I know exactly what's happening and I know too that I am jumping out of this plane of my own free will" (*W* 39).

Certainty

As previously argued, *Written on the Body* generally reaches beyond Sartre, because love is not terminated along with the impending loss of Louise. Instead it appears to become heightened as the narrator is engulfed by memories. The mourning process makes Louise as present in the narrator's life as when she was physically there:

She was my twin and I lost her. Skin is waterproof but my skin was not waterproof against Louise. She flooded me and she has not drained away. I am still wading through her, she beats upon my doors and threatens my innermost safety. I have no gondola at the gate and the tide is still rising. Swim for it, don't be afraid. I am afraid. Is this her revenge? 'I will never let you go'. (*W* 163)

The allusions to *The Passion* are evident, with the metaphor of the gondola at the gate, and this reinforces how much the narrator resembles Henri, who is also incapable of fully releasing the beloved. The resemblance is extended when we note that *Written on the Body* embraces the lies and restrictions of love as Henri does.

Louise's absence does not end the narrator's love for her. The love is after all measured by his/her loss. Singer's *The Pursuit of Love* differentiates between optimistic and pessimistic Romanticism in the nineteenth century and his work on Liebestod is irresistibly applicable to the narrator's continuing love for Louise once s/he is separated from her:

Some romantics think their oneness will even outlive death, either as a renewal of the love they attain on earth or as its perfection in the next world. The concept of Liebestod includes the idea that love cannot flourish until the lovers die. All this presupposes that true love is indestructible. In that event, the unity that defines romantic love can surmount death and go on forever. (67)

The possibility of indestructible love is suggested by *Written on the Body*, as love transcends presence and absence. It circles, or spirals, around whether the loved object is there or not. Neither death nor the spectre of death can diminish the love.

The narrative circles back continuously to Louise because the narrator cannot erase her. In the medical section of *Written on the Body* the narrator recognises that the beloved cannot be forgotten and resigns him/herself to this. This section, 'The Cells, Tissues, Systems and Cavities of the Body', breaks completely with the rest of the novel as it becomes an obsessive paean to the beloved:

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. (*W* 111)

These words offer the narrator the chance of unification with his/her beloved. Language is the bridge that will bring the lovers together, or so the narrator hopes in his/her grief.

The narrator is grieving for Louise and hopes that these words will help him/her to get closer to her. Freud's 'Our Attitude Towards Death' states that the act of looking for the cause of death is effectively an attempt at discounting the inevitable: "Our

habit is to lay stress on the fortuitous causation of the death – accident, disease, infection, advanced age; in this way we betray an effort to reduce death from a necessity to a chance event” (290). So, even in the midst of the narrator feeling his/her way through Louise’s dying body with words s/he is, in Freud’s terms, denying the necessity of death. Far from admitting the inevitability of mutability, the narrator is wishing for the illusion that time can stand still. Freud’s ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ also understands the difficulty in recovering from the loss of a loved one, and gives a framework for the narrator’s grief:

Reality-testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachment to that object. This demand arouses understandable opposition – it is a matter of general observation that people never willingly abandon a libidinal position, not even, indeed, when a substitute is already beckoning to them. (244)

On analysing this reference closely, it may be said that because the narrator continues to circle back to thoughts of Louise throughout *Written on the Body* it is as though s/he cannot relinquish Louise or the libidinal position. The ‘understandable opposition’ that Freud writes of is inherent in the narrator’s inability or refusal to let Louise go. The beckoning substitute as represented by Gail Right acts as a metaphor for the measure of how much the narrator loves Louise and of how unwilling s/he is to replace her.

The medical section of the novel is inserted between loving the present and absent Louise. If the words in this section were acts they would pull the body apart like a pathologist or a surgeon. Louise’s white T cells are no longer obeying the rules, “they were her immunity, her certainty against infection. Now they are the enemies on the

inside" (*W* 115). The false certainty of immunity is revealed as the body turns against itself. The joy of deceiving others by cross-dressing in *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* is checked in this novel as corporeality becomes more serious. Changing clothes to disguise the self is discarded thematically as Louise's terminally ill body takes precedence over the issue of gender politics. Death and love are ultimately constructed to transcend the polarisation of gender.

The narrator has become resigned to not being able to escape from Louise and the ensuing immersion in words graphically represents the depth of his/her loss. Murderous love is hinted at in the novel as a whole and love is depicted occasionally as a parasite that goes too far and kills the host. The narrator wants to drown him/herself in Louise, suggesting a wish for total loss of self. Images that recall necrophilia and cannibalism also abound in *Written on the Body*: "I didn't only want Louise's flesh, I wanted her bones, her blood, her tissues, the sinews that bound her together. I would have held her to me though time had stripped away the tones and textures of her skin. I could have held her for a thousand years until the skeleton itself rubbed away to dust" (*W* 51). The deadly appeal of this begins in *Written on the Body*'s recognition of the lover wanting all of his/her beloved, even if this will kill the love between them in Sartre's conceptualisation. The narrator describes him/herself as a "lethal" lover (*W* 53), and the following specifies that loving, for him/her, is not far away from killing: "I held you as Death will hold you. Death that slowly pulls down the skin's heavy curtain to expose the bony cage behind" (*W* 132).

Cannibalism and its less taboo counterpart oral sex are invoked as a measure of how much the narrator and Louise want to consume each other. The cannibal reappears in *Gut Symmetries* when Jove literally eats his wife, who is the flesh of his flesh, and the foundation for his behaviour is traceable to *Written on the Body*. The

narrator of *Written on the Body* answers his/her own question, “is food sexy?” as he/she contemplates the eroticisation of being consumed by another (*W* 36): “When she lifted the soup spoon to her lips how I longed to be that innocent piece of stainless steel. I would gladly have traded the blood in my body for half a pint of vegetable stock” (*W* 36). The sensuousness of food and eating is re-explored in *The Powerbook*, but *Written on the Body*’s imagery hints more strongly at the link between the erotic and death as it trades in metaphors that imply violence and bodily sacrifice.

The themes of eating, and of being eaten, are also present in *Oranges* and *Sexing the Cherry*, ostensibly with their use of fruit symbols. To a certain extent, these symbols rely on the Christian taboo of the forbidden fruit for their cultural references. Maria Lozano in ‘How You Cuddle in the Dark...’ explores the religious connotation attached to cannibalism: “No doubt cannibalism is a very organic form of metamorphosis, favoured by and with the authority of the Christian Church, that uses that icon in its central rite; it has, therefore the sanctions of the male discourse of history” (134). Marina Warner’s *No Go the Bogeyman* also exposes the hypocrisy of the Church on this issue: “The taboo on cannibalism – on eating your own kind – offers the apparently unbreakable standard of propriety and hence ethics. Yet it is always being broken through performance and metaphor, thus plunging the system of discrimination between the good and bad eaters into disarray” (139).

The ‘good’ and ‘bad’ eaters are differentiated by Lozano and, as she points out, by Cixous with the figure of the “voracious” Medusa where the engulfing fictional woman has been historically reified into a symbol of castration (Lozano 129). The distinction between patriarchal obsessions with blaming women for Man’s Fall, from the Gorgon to the pomegranate to the apple, and necessary female subjectivity are

(almost) collapsed in *Written on the Body*, however, with the use of the gender-unspecified narrator.

The collapse of gender politics can never be understood as entire because of Louise. She is a shared object of desire as well as the lover of her beloved. Her treatment is decided for her by her husband and her lover and from a gendered perspective she is typical of the romanticised beautiful figure that encapsulates femininity as sacrificial for the needs of the plot. Louise wants to possess the narrator, but this desire is reciprocated and becomes apparent when the narrator wants to steal from her. S/he yearns to own Louise, even if it is only by taking a napkin or spoon that belongs to her (*W* 50). The narrator desires to possess Louise and this is emphasised when remembering that Louise is created and translated into what she is by the narrator's words. Through Louise's living and dying body love and death are projected together on to her. Without Louise there would be no story of loss to recount but it is the narrator's measure of loss, rather than Louise's, that the reader is privy to.

Bronfen's *Over Her Dead Body* claims that death and the beautiful woman can be both morbidly and aesthetically pleasing because together they reaffirm that "we" (the readers) are alive (x). Bronfen continues: "Femininity and death cause a disorder to stability, mark moments of ambivalence, disruption or duplicity and their eradication produces a recuperation of order, a return to stability" (xii). *Written on the Body* knowingly creates Louise as a nineteenth-century fictional heroine, and relates eroticised femininity to the sick body and death. The mourning for her does not encompass reading the feminine as a threat, however, instead it regrets its passing. Louise may still be read as a cynical tool used to heighten the pathos because she is the cultural signifier who is valued on the surface. The narrator convinces the reader

of the pleasure available in looking at Louise, comparing her to a pre-Raphaelite heroine and stating that if “I” were a painter her hair would be a swarm of butterflies (*W* 29). Farwell also notes how the beloved Louise is compared to nature, which Farwell sees as “one of the most disabling positions for the woman because of the muteness of nature and therefore of the beloved” (189). However, *Written on the Body* revises the threat that Bronfen exposes because it never stops analysing the effects of losing Louise. The text does not obliterate her in her absence. It follows her instead in a spiral of loss.

Uncertainty

The narrator’s objectification of Louise, and the persuasion of the reader to do the same, could also be understood as a drawback of elegy and mourning. This is because the survivor engulfs the lost object to become the one of paramount importance. In the process the object is overlooked. The description of Louise as a dying, beautiful pre-Raphaelite woman makes her the Elizabeth Siddall to the narrator’s Rossetti. To tell this story, the narrator has to ransack Louise’s body as a means to elevate and beautify the mourning process as well as the object of desire.⁴ *Written on the Body* is an elegaic tribute to Louise’s beauty and life. Ensnared with this is the extent to which the narrator owns almost all of the sympathy and the narrative. Love is described as having the potential to be lethal, as has been argued up to this point, and words shape how love and hate have been understood. The narrator is reporting the events though. Because of his/her unreliability the binary of truth and lies is necessarily deconstructed.

⁴ Winterson has used Rossetti’s story earlier in *Oranges*, when Jeanette is working in the funeral parlour (*O* 57).

Written on the Body records and marks down the effects of loss in the light of différance. The sense of loss is constantly deferred, as it continues without resolution. The meaning of the narrator's loss, and the anguish suffered, is measured in relation to the difference between this and other losses. The effect of différance ties in with the way the narrator exploits the supplementary effect of writing. This point circles the discussion back to 'The Postcard'. Louise's absence is made present through the narrator's words and so her figurative if not literal death is being partially overcome. She becomes alive and is resurrected by language. The narrator's reliance on fictions to get out of "real situations" helps to explain why s/he would turn to writing as a form of self-immersion in Louise (*W* 55). The narrator is a translator by profession and this is one of the few details that we learn about him/her. S/he earns money with words and finds some kind of solace there, although this becomes insufficient the more s/he reads the anatomy book. In the anatomisation of the face, for example, the technical language becomes a means to avoid the awfulness of leukaemia and loss:

Your face gores me. I am run through. Into the holes I pack splinters of hope but hope does not heal me. Should I pack my eyes with forgetfulness, eyes grown thin through looking? Frontal bone, palatine bones, nasal bones, lacrimal bones, cheek bones, maxilla, vomer inferior conchae, mandible. Those are my shields, those are my blankets, those words don't remind me of your face. (*W* 132)

This quotation is read by Børch from another perspective in a manner that is coincidentally reminiscent of Poe's *The Oval Portrait*, which is analysed in relation to *The Passion* in chapter two of this thesis: "The passage, then, ponders the ancient paradox – the way art refines experience, but kills it in the act: still life is still not art" (Børch 52). The narrator is preserving Louise through the words and killing her at the

same time, which returns the reader to interpreting Louise as pre-Raphaelite heroine. As Lindenmeyer notes: “Moreover, Louise is not only a female body, but also a work of art. The image of her body floating in water is suggestive of paintings of Ophelia, death-bound, floating downstream” (57). The narrator’s desire to drown in words when reading the anatomy book is connected to this metaphor. Conversely, these words are also his/her armour against pain.

The narrator experiences a change of heart when s/he decides that s/he does not want just words any more as s/he dwells on the medical jargon: “Now that I have lost you I cannot allow you to develop, you must be a photograph not a poem” (*W* 118). The image as photograph echoes Barthes’ search for his mother’s photograph in the Winter Garden, and which he never shows, in *Camera Lucida*. The photograph for Barthes is “undialectical”, “when it is painful nothing in it can transform grief into mourning” (90). The photograph gives him relative stasis. Griselda Pollock, in ‘Deadly Tales’, criticises *Camera Lucida* because she sees “quintessential forms of the Western masculine narratives which embrace death rather than acknowledge the humanity of women” (230). If this were to be agreed upon in this thesis the narrator of *Written on the Body* must also be accused of the same crime, but I feel that Pollock dismisses Barthes too readily. In her ‘Afterword’ Pollock undermines her earlier stance somewhat and admits to being touched by Barthes’ “poignant frankness” (230), and comes extremely close to stating the same impossibility of grief that Barthes and *Written on the Body* describe:

However hard I have tried to find aesthetic forms through which to shuffle my pain and grief, to fix death to an image which contains and yet defers it, pacifies it, I cannot in all honesty pretend that the photograph, or any sequence of images I might manipulate and call art, can stop that endless

time of someone being missing in daily life as well as in all psychological stagings of my own formations. (Pollock 233)

Camera Lucida is also wary of fixing too readily on consolation, as is *Written on the Body*. Similarly to Pollock, Barthes and the narrator of *Written on the Body* hope to find consolation where none is available, but the search is still necessary as a means of protection from the abyss that is created when mourning a lost loved one.

The acts of mourning a lost love and falling in love are comparable to each other when understanding Louise's face as the spectre of the novel. The narrator sees it on coins, in fact s/he sees it everywhere, once s/he has fallen in love with her. When Jacqueline timidly asks if the narrator is 'seeing' Louise s/he wants to reply, but only thinks, the following: "Of course I'm seeing her. I see her face on every hoarding, on the coins in my pocket. I see her when I look at you" (*W* 56). The image of Louise is seared into the narrator's mind as s/he falls in love with her. This point is also similar to the narrator's grief for a dead friend whom the narrator continued to see in spite of death. The ability to see a loved one brings an element of talismanic comfort, even though this comfort is limited, as Pollock, Barthes and Winterson admit.

Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse* offers a reading of love that claims, similarly to *Written on the Body*, that desire, like love, can never be fully requited: "Though each love is experienced as unique and though the subject rejects the notion of repeating it elsewhere later on, he sometimes discovers in himself a kind of diffusion of amorous desire; he then realises he is doomed to wander until he dies, from love to love" (101). This uncannily (and unwittingly) describes the narrator before meeting Louise, where the lover is doomed to wander from one relationship to the other. Louise now acts as an embodiment of the impossibility of finding true love forever. Mutability effectively transforms the idyll of lasting love to a lie. Love in the novel is idealised whilst its

transience is simultaneously highlighted and Louise is a figure for this transience. The passion of *Written on the Body* ensures that the narrative defies closure as it continues into its spiral of mourning. The novel ends with the following sentence, which reveals its resistance to such closure: "I don't know if this is a happy ending but here we are let loose in open fields" (*W* 190). A freedom of sorts is offered by this final sentence, and is more optimistic than Barthes' 'doomed wandering', but it is still promoting the deferral of pleasure. This is necessary with respect to the loss of a loved one as sadness is inherent in not being able to hold on to the lover. It is also typical of Winterson's use of deconstruction in undermining the certainty of happiness in a relationship between lover and beloved

In conclusion, the uncertainty of *Written on the Body* is written into the undecidable gender of the narrator. This is just one more uncertainty in a novel that circles around the unfairness and insecurity that is experienced with the loss of a loved one. The certainty of *Written on the Body* appears in the idealisation of love. This continues to be the fixture in Winterson's work as she 'unshackles' her writing from the supposed certainty of realism that Gerard implies.

Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse* is utilised more fully in conjunction with *Art and Lies* in the next chapter as Winterson investigates the associations between language and love in more detail. The arbitrariness of love, and the deferral of meaning that is encoded in the narrator's wandering after (and wondering about) Louise the lost object, exposes the illusion of romantic love. The impossibility of this love is the impossibility of union between the lovers, which is emphasised by the impending death of Louise. Paradoxically this illusion is maintained despite the postmodern inflections in the novel that suggest that romantic love is fictional, as the narrator's grief refuses to diminish the trauma of losing a loved one. The novel revolves around

the theme of loss. It proclaims that even if love is a construct, or an illusion, it is nevertheless impossible to console the lover who is left behind. It is the loss of the desired one that heightens the love, which circles the reader back to the beginning of *Written on the Body*, where the narrator asks: "Why is the measure of love loss?" (*W* 9).

Chapter Five

The Language of Love

Art and Lies

At a paperback launch for *The Powerbook* Winterson explained that *Art and Lies: A Piece for Three Voices and a Bawd* came about as a change in form from the one-voiced narrator in the previous novel, *Written on the Body*.¹ *Art and Lies* has three main narrators, in addition to the bawd Doll Sneerpiece. This novel extends from *Written on the Body*'s unknowable, gender-unspecified 'I', to three main strands. These voices dip in and out and are fragmented further by the seventeenth-century Doll. *Art and Lies* splinters out to encompass different voices, and because of this no one figure has control. Its extension from the one narrator of *Written on the Body* to a shared narrative continues (in a more straightforward style) in *Gut Symmetries*. The re-appropriated device of shared narration, last used by Winterson in *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*, is newly formatted in *Art and Lies* because it does not have the exposition of the former novels.

Written on the Body and *Art and Lies* are specifically analysed and used now to demonstrate how Winterson toys with the idea that language is constitutive. Language is also a tool to communicate about love. *Art and Lies* is the predominant focus of attention, with *Written on the Body* acting as an introduction to this next novel.

The framework for the following discussion relies on three sub-headings: the letter, the word and the book. These distinctions are employed to construct the argument in layers of literature. This is in order to make overt the interest this chapter

¹ This was at the Leeds branch of Waterstones in May 2001.

has in language. The questions that arise from these two texts, and in this chapter, are: is love formed by language as a poststructuralist theory might conclude? And (or) does language offer the means to express the emotion of love? The priority of this discussion rests on realising that Winterson recognises the validity of both of these questions in these two novels and plays with the questions without firm resolution. These two novels are the most extreme in their experimentation in Winterson's work up to and including *The Powerbook*, yet they both still hold on to traditional Wintersonian notions of the transcendent power of love. Once again, poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theories are used as frameworks as they separately unveil a late-twentieth-century view of the power that language has. This power is, however, limited in Winterson's novels as her prescription that love should be transcendent means that the slippage of meaning inherent in these two specific texts is limited rather than de-centring.

Comparing the reference, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God" from John (1:1) with Sappho's similar statement, "In the beginning was the Word. And at the end" (*AL* 147), it would appear that the creation of the world by God is superseded by language in *Art and Lies*. The power of the word in *Art and Lies* is borrowed directly from John and refashioned into being, in this reference at least, the most powerful entity. It offers autonomy and decisiveness to those who use it. God is separated from the word in *Art and Lies* and the word assumes the higher position in the hierarchy. Its three main narrators (Handel, Picasso and Sappho) reinforce this by critiquing God as the head of organised religion. The phrase 'and at the end' implies that language replaces the old God with a new form shaped by an awareness of poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theories.

If Winterson only manages to replace one hierarchy with another, that is, God with language, it might be thought that the king is dead, long live the king as one superior reality is imposed over another. The complexities of *Art and Lies*, which can be traced from *Written on the Body*, rely however on a plural vision. Sentimentality is mostly banished from a world that constantly defers meaning, but *Art and Lies* and *Written on the Body* still have the capacity to move the reader with love stories. They both demonstrate more complexity than a 'simple' poststructuralist account of love and language because language is never ultimately given the role of God. Love acts as a quiet voice that prevents these novels from disappearing entirely into a preoccupation with signs, signifiers and signifieds. Theoretical and philosophical enquiries into language in form and content structure *Art and Lies*, yet underneath the instability of meaning is the emotion. The seduction of the word, and seduction by the word, are the main tenets of this novel. It is love that is the 'new' transcendent force. It is the 'new' religion and the 'new' theory. There is an ethical balance to this force, as the power to abuse with love is also exposed in *Art and Lies*. This abuse demonstrates how with the help of words love can be used for destructive purposes.

The Letter

The letters that make up the word are the first stage of this enquiry into Winterson's interest in love and language. The letters of love begin, of course, with the letter 'L'. *Written on the Body* fixes on this character, but the text never permits the reader to decide permanently what the precise meaning of it is within the context of the novel. If this novel is to be classified as a love story it may be assumed that the 'L' signifies love. But it also represents at different times Louise, large-sized boxer shorts, lesbians and loss. In short, the 'L' in *Written on the Body* is overtly

undecidable, a word which contains echoes of Derridean thinking. Although it is not possible to establish the meaning of the letter with full confidence, the structure of the novel is still upheld because of its reliance on uncertainty. This uncertainty ties in with its adherence to the loss of the loved one. The undecidable 'L' epitomises the facets of the novel that depend on uncertainty. One implication of this structure and the shifting meaning of 'L' is that love is also undecidable and indefinable. Love's meaning shifts according to its context.

This understanding of language, which is aware that it is language that has created us and not God, is a methodology that may be interpreted as either nihilistic or liberating. A humanist perspective would find fault with the implications of endless deferral of meaning that suggests that everything, including love, is relative. This relativity can be understood as liberating though in that love is freed from a fixed ideology of a single dominant discourse. For example, love no longer has to be a 'love' that is knowable between heterosexual married couples and God. The stress on, and repetition of, a single unit of signification may seem to be too pedantic within this chapter and in *Written on the Body* but the play with 'L' in both instances is a valid method for unlocking language from a humanist thrall and for destabilising the idea of a fixed knowable love. The gender-free narrative and its speaking 'I' join with the 'L' in being unknowable in binary terms. These points constantly unsettle the readers' knowledge of the love story between the narrator and Louise. The floating 'L' and 'I' release the narrator and the reader from the restrictions of what a love story should or should not be when compared to a historically heterosexual-biased narrative.

Another letter.

Lacan's lost *objet petit 'a'* is that which can never be achieved or explained, yet it is fixed in abstract terms. It stands for 'autre' (other) and is emblematic of otherness, other and Other as 'grand Autre'. This 'a' is interpreted by Jacqueline Rose as, "Lacan's formula for the lost object which underpins symbolisation, cause of and stand in for desire" (Mitchell and Rose 48). The lost object in this context underpins the symbolic order. Love as such is not fully explained by the 'a' (other), but it may be read as acting as irretrievable desire. The 'a' becomes the closest means to name love.

If, for now, desire is seen as elemental to love agreement may be found with Kristeva's view in *Tales of Love*: "In short, love is an affliction, and by the same token it is a word or a letter" (6). Louise of *Written on the Body* may be understood as the lost *objet 'a'*, a symbol for desire that can never be fully reached. The narrator's loss of her becomes a symbol for expressing the affliction of the loss of this object. Otherness suggests separation and unattainability. Desire is founded on lack in psychoanalytic theory and this gap between lover and beloved is relied upon by Winterson in all of her main novels (not just *Written on the Body*) as elemental to the unhappy love story. De Rougemont's words, which are cited in relation to *The Passion*, that 'happy love has no history' are explicable in Lacanian terms as being due to the 'nature' of desire.

If love *is* just a letter, it is slightly depressing for those who yearn for the dream of romantic love. Lacan's 'a' suggests there will never be closure, as desire is defined by its never being attained. The fulfilment of desire is unachievable once in the Symbolic Order. The loss of the pre-lingual as a precept for attaining the letter of the law is represented by this 'a' and is present in the first line of *Written on the Body*, "why is

the measure of love loss?" (9) and in Picasso's retreat in *Art and Lies* to colour in her reaction to being raped by her half-brother Matthew. The name Picasso informs the reader of the extent of this protagonist's artistic removal from the 'lies' of realism and from the Law of her Father. The name Picasso represents the kind of art her father hates, because of its surreal rather than realist connotations. His name for her is Sophia and he refuses to conform to her desire to be re-named Picasso. Whereas Handel and Sappho lament the loss of high art's status, Picasso differs as she functions as a representative for those who are unable to belong to the Law. It is too painful for Picasso to stay in the house where she has been abused. The house becomes a metaphor for the Law. When she paints it and its inhabitants and leaves the house behind she breaks the Law with these transgressive acts. Language as exemplified by the Symbolic Order has betrayed Picasso because it has been used as a weapon against her. The extent of Picasso's transgression and the anger that she experiences because of her abuse is examined later in this chapter. Suffice it to say for now that Picasso's stand is enacted outside the alphabet. It is driven by emotion, rather than by an accepted cultural response. It also symbolises the power of colour in *Art and Lies*' narrative frame. If it is agreed that Picasso has tried to react from outside the Law she is also capable of re-figuring desire, which suggests that Lacan's lost 'a' may after all be achieved, as long as the 'benefits' of civilisation are forsaken. As far as Picasso is concerned there are no such benefits anyway.

The typographical character and the epistle share the same signifier, letter, which enables a play between their similarities and differences. When the topic of love is introduced the discussion takes on an extra dimension, because the love letter carries the weight of a particularly personal form of communication. *Written on the Body* and *Art and Lies* have love letters of sorts in their plots. In *Written on the Body* the

narrator writes a farewell letter to Louise; in *Art and Lies* Handel reads out the one he received from his lover/abuser the Cardinal. Furthermore, when the narrator of *Written on the Body* claims to be writing “this” to Louise whilst sitting at the library desk (*W* 88), the entire novel becomes a love letter. In the previous chapter it is argued that *Written on the Body* is constructed by the narrator’s endless mourning for Louise. It is also now an endless chain of signifiers.

This endless love letter is comparable to Barthes’ explanation of “I-love-you” in *A Lover’s Discourse*. His preliminary definition asks for ‘I love you’ to be understood as a ‘love cry’: “The figure refers not to the declaration of love, to the avowal, but to the repeated utterance of the love cry” (147). The circularity of *Written on the Body*, especially when read as a love letter, resembles this love cry because of the repetition on the lover’s part. Such endless circling incorporates Barthes’ love cry into the textuality of *Written on the Body*. It is repeated and re-echoed in every page, word and letter of the text.

Lynne Pearce’s “‘Written on Tablets of Stone?’” also reads *A Lover’s Discourse* alongside Winterson’s writing. Pearce wrote this before *Written on the Body* or *Art and Lies* were published, so her reading of Barthes’ text in relation to Winterson’s work is necessarily going to differ from mine. It is still possible to find agreement in the way Pearce finds common ground between both writers, in that they see love as a construction. Barthes uses the alphabet to structure his text and, because of this, ‘love’ is fragmented arbitrarily but this is not to say it becomes arid or meaningless. Barthes recognises that the closest one can come to discussing love is from a poststructuralist angle, but this will also never be sufficient as love evades translation. Winterson also adopts this perspective, primarily in *Written on the Body* and *Art and Lies*. In earlier

and later novels she distances her work from such an outright inclusion of postmodernist/poststructuralist conceptualisation.

Pearce outlines her comparative analysis of Barthes and Winterson thus:

In this article I shall attempt to illustrate the tension between the universal and the particular in Winterson's work by reading her stories of 'falling in love' against Barthes's characterization of *ravissement* (ravishment: 'love at first sight') in *A Lover's Discourse*. My contention is that although Barthes and Winterson both present romantic love as a discourse, Winterson challenges Barthes's ahistorical and (largely) ungendered inscription of it. ('Written' 148)

It could be argued that after *Sexing the Cherry* Winterson goes on to do exactly what Pearce claims Barthes is guilty of, because in *Written on the Body* there is a largely ahistorical and ungendered reading of love. Again, Pearce wrote this before *Written on the Body* was published so pointing this out is nothing more than having the benefit of hindsight. Both *Art and Lies* and *Written on the Body* use love as a theme to highlight how barriers between genders are false constructs and that love metaphorically unhinges the false opposition. It becomes apparent that Barthes and Winterson are aware of the inexplicability of love and this constructs their love as a remaining riddle at a time when postmodernity appears to have de-centred, if not explained, everything else.

Handel's letter from the Cardinal appears in the last chapter of *Art and Lies*. He reads this "only now", years later (*AL* 201), and has received no others from him, although the Cardinal claims to have sent some. The adult Handel says that if there were letters he never saw them (*AL* 201). The Cardinal is a complex, absent figure, who is a ghost from Handel's childhood. He maintains he loved Handel in his letter

and yet was responsible for the operation that made Handel a castrato. Handel's parents halted communication between the two once they discovered what had happened. The letter includes the lines, "I knew that I might lose you to love. I did not guess that I could lose you to indifference. Why did you not answer even one of my letters?" (*AL* 201). Handel's response was, "too late now. The man had waited too long. His friend had waited as long as he could" (*AL* 202). The man is Handel and because of the novel's tendency to shift abruptly from first to third person Handel is distanced as he puts the letter away, to become the man. For a moment it is not clear if the man or the friend is Handel. This deliberate ambiguity insists that the perspectives of both men are shared as Handel momentarily becomes the Cardinal.

A letter is sent and then delivered. In Lacan's 'Seminar on The Purloined Letter' the rights of ownership are queried. He asks: "Might a letter on which the sender retains certain rights then not quite belong to the person to whom it is addressed? Or might it be that the latter was never the real receiver" (57). The love letter is an extraordinary document which textualises the special relationship of meaning and language, and when the sender and recipient are confused the proprietorial aspect of love is diminished. The beloved and the lover become confused as well. The first to third person leap, which is evident in the section above concerning Handel, occurs as a repeated technique in *Art and Lies* and echoes Lacan's questioning of who the owner (the subject) is. It is also reminiscent of Derrida's 'The Post Card', which I have previously discussed in relation to *Written on the Body*. The switch from first to third person upsets the narratorial authority and subsequently the faith in understanding the novel. Meaning becomes fragile because of the style of writing and this mimics the uncertainty of what love actually is.

When Sappho ponders over which came first, the muser, or the muse, the difference between the subject and the object again becomes complicated (*AL* 140). As far as common sense is concerned the Muser is the Muser and the muse is the muse. Lacan's disruptive questioning of who is the owner of the letter comes back to haunt this text, however, particularly when read in conjunction with Winterson's deconstructive techniques. Ownership and meaning becomes undermined and the rights to property, or who loves whom, are also destabilised.

When meaning is difficult to interpret and ambiguity is fostered, ethics can become a problematic issue. The criticisms of poststructuralist and Lacanian thought perceive a conservative vein in undecidability. Even though I refute this and prefer to argue that both theories are tools to use to one's own ends, rather than being mastered by them, there is an aspect of *Art and Lies* that is morally cloudy and may be thought of as condoning child abuse. Picasso's situation is quite clear. Her half-brother raped her until she was 15, and her father raped her birth mother. Handel's situation is a little more problematic to define though, that is, did the Cardinal abuse him or not? The ambiguity of what love is rests on this issue in *Art and Lies*. The letter from the Cardinal is addressed to "Darling Boy" (*AL* 201). Even though the Cardinal seduced Handel when Handel was only ten years old and the Cardinal was almost seventy, Handel as an adult still retains the nickname given to him by his 'lover': "Handel. I kept the name but lost the namesake, Handel, a composer happy in his own enchantments. But the enchanted space is gone and there is a sword across the gate. I cannot return" (*AL* 200). This quotation is an examination of the disenchanting adult once childhood has disappeared and who is mourning the loss of innocence. As an adult Handel believes that the 'enchanted space' cannot be regained. Attached to this is the hint that his love for the Cardinal was only possible because he did not realise

how impossible their relationship would be from the perspective of their surrounding society. It is perhaps brave of Winterson to place Picasso's narrative of abuse alongside Handel's love for a man who was sixty years older than him. By doing this Winterson offers a confused message about 'love' and disavows a simplistic view that would interpret Handel as a victim rather than a lover.

The influence of the Cardinal on Handel is evident in the retention of the name Handel that the Cardinal gave him as a child. The score from 'Der Rosenkavalier' at the end of *Art and Lies* is another remnant from their relationship. This was the Cardinal's favourite opera and a former lover had performed in it. By holding on to his alias, and the fact of the score, it appears that Handel misses his own enchanted time. This opera is concerned with the heroine's fear that her lover will find somebody younger to replace her and the presence of the score implies that Handel is sympathetic to this fear. But again, he has stated that it is too late now, because time has passed. His parents separated him from the Cardinal after discovering the operation and Handel ponders retrospectively: "Which cut did the harm? His or theirs?" (*AL* 201). There are two connotations implicit in these questions. The cut of the operation and the ties severed by his parents co-exist here. Their co-existence emphasises how Handel's love for the Cardinal cannot be dismissed, as the most harmful cut cannot be decided upon. Lacan's 'The Mirror Stage' in *Ecrits* proposes that psychoanalysis assists in revealing the aggression that is implicit in individuation and understands that love works to break us from 'imaginary servitude':

The sufferings of neurosis and psychosis are for us a schooling in the passions of the soul, just as the beam of the psychoanalytic scales, when we calculate the tilt of its threat to entire communities, provides us with an indication of the deadening of the passions in society. At this junction of

nature and culture, so persistently examined by modern anthropology, psychoanalysis alone recognises this knot of imaginary servitude that love must always undo again, or sever. (7)

The idea of severing from (or being severed from) the past was first introduced by Winterson in *Oranges* where it is both an impossible, traumatic event and an act of renewal, even re-birth. Handel at this point in the narrative has not quite embraced the optimistic value in beginning again. This comes as he faces his judgement day at the end of the novel. He manages this without psychoanalytic theory, however; his salvation comes from a quasi-religious source and self-forgiveness. The connection with Lacan's argument is maintained, though, as it is love after all, for self and others, that releases Handel from his repression. The parallels between Lacan's faith in psychoanalysis (the talking cure?) and Winterson's subtext of Christian Agape are apparent in Handel's redemption. Phallogocentrically speaking, the power of the word becomes transcendent in psychoanalysis and religion. *Art and Lies* not only recognises this historical transcendence of the word in Christian teachings, but it also attempts to recuperate it away from organised religion, specifically Catholicism, and maintain its power for more ethical purposes. This is apparent in Handel's salvation after having renounced the Church and the medical profession.

The letter from the Cardinal is a relic from the past. When it was written it was already 'too late' and the words only serve to say that the love between the Cardinal and Handel was never going to be viable. The letter appears to be written to another adult, as though the Cardinal was blind to the restrictions from the outer world. He interprets Handel's lack of response as a sign of "indifference" (*AL* 201). The adult has become the child whilst claiming to be in love and fails to see the boundaries between an adult relationship and child abuse. Winterson disturbs the certainty of the

definition of child abuse, particularly when placing it alongside Picasso's story. By doing this, the sender and the recipient of the letter and the muser or the muse, even the abuser or the abused, are put into uncertain positions as the ramifications of undecidability unfold.

The Word

You said, 'I love you'. Why is it that the most unoriginal thing we can say to one another is still the thing we long to hear? 'I love you' is always a quotation. You did not say it first and neither did I, yet when you say it and when I say it we speak like savages who have found three words and worship them. (*W* 9)

Love, the four letter word which holds so many implications within it, is referred to between 'I' and 'you' and acts as the Rialto bridge metaphor that is used in *The Passion*. It is a meeting place and a barrier as it can be drawn up (or withheld). Its message can please or control: I love you. In the above quotation from *Written on the Body* love is always a quotation, yet it is always new when we say it, as though it is a fresh discovery. This quotation implies that we are born into language, but these words, I love you, feel original in the mouths of those in love. This bemusement at how the word love slips under the net of theory is visible in Kristeva's *Tales of Love*: "the language of love is impossible, inadequate, immediately allusive when one would like it to be most straightforward; it is a flight of metaphors – it is literature" (1). In this sense the 'language of love' stretches beyond 'I love you' but strangely stays there too, which is also how Barthes treats love in *A Lover's Discourse*. These words are never straightforward because of their historical influence. Kristeva

admits, as *Written on the Body* and *Art and Lies* also appear to, that there is an uncertainty about the meaning of love, but these three words together are still immediately and, dare I say it, universally recognisable as precious. They may even be read in Winterson's novels as reaching the core of our being, if there were such a thing.

The use of words in *Art and Lies* is viewed by Ursula Heise as resembling "prose poetry" more than "conventional narrative" (555), and she suggests a parallel between this novel and Woolf's *The Waves*. The connection between Woolf and Winterson has already been examined in chapter three of this thesis and is therefore not dwelt upon here. Nevertheless, when noticing a possible influence of *The Waves* on *Art and Lies* it helps the Winterson critic to understand that *Art and Lies* breaks from its own past (for example *Sexing the Cherry*) into an even more experimental area which foregrounds language over plot. Of course it is staying with its past as well if the resemblance to Woolf's novel is acknowledged.

In 'Jeanette Winterson and the Aftermath of Feminism' Patricia Duncker believes that *Art and Lies* has the courage of *Written on the Body*'s convictions (85). This complies with Winterson's view that the two novels are connected by an extension of ideas. Duncker's opinion of *Written on the Body* is, however, that it is "a text full of lost opportunities" (85). She decries how the device of the gender-free narrator does not exploit the lesbian aspect of the novel. Although I believe *Written on the Body* should not be reduced to an either/or text, for example 'solving' the narrator's sex and sexuality as though it were necessary, some agreement may be found with Duncker in that *Art and Lies* has the courage to push even further in its experimentation from one unknown narrator to three fragmented voices.

Duncker regards the anger in *Art and Lies* as a positive aspect: “The best of queer emotion is pure, undiluted rage. Here is Winterson’s strength. *Art and Lies* is a polemical book, an angry book. It is not delicate, playful or self-indulgently vain. There is something at stake.” (85). The anger Duncker recognises is evident in Handel and Sappho’s stance against the loss of past values, specifically in art. It is also observable in Picasso’s anger, which moves from self-hatred to an outward direction at the people and institutions that have taken part in tacitly permitting her abuse.

Christy Burns, in ‘Powerful Differences’, is perhaps more measured than Duncker in her understanding of how Winterson uses rage in both *Art and Lies* and *Art Objects*: “If Winterson utilizes anger to bring about social revision, she also cautions against art as pure rant. There is a fine line between rage and witness, and Winterson has chosen the very dangerous task of walking that line.” (388). Burns’ position relies on sympathetically understanding the association between Woolf and Winterson and in this reference is careful to point out how Winterson does not ignore Woolf’s advice in *A Room of One’s Own* when she argues against the pure rant in women’s writing. The preservation of ‘art’ is a concern for Winterson and, as Burns recognises, the rage that Winterson demonstrates is counterbalanced by the decision to call not just for ‘social revision’.

Burns’ understanding of how Winterson’s writing performs a balancing act has parallels with Lynne Pearce’s “Written on Tablets of Stone?”. Both Burns and Pearce appreciate the complexity of Winterson’s work and the following quotation from “Written on Tablets of Stone?” clarifies all the more how Winterson is ambiguous in her representations of love and language: “...Winterson’s chief assault on the ‘tyranny’ of romantic love ideology is via her denial of an apparently inevitable chronology (and causality) of events: we may not be able to escape the stories, but we

can learn to write them differently” (149). Agency is available in Winterson’s novels then within the parameters of the Symbolic Order.

For Sappho ‘the word’ is her means to speculate on and rage about the abuse of language, including the destruction of her poems. The two chapters out of eight that she narrates hover over the word. Sappho associates the power of the word with the Church of Rome which still calls her a heretic. This has been referred to in the introduction to this chapter when comparing the New Testament’s John with Sappho and the play on words in Sappho’s quotation. Sappho also urges independence from the Church when she demands “know thyself” “and make sure that the Church never finds out” (*AL* 54):

The Word terrifies. The seducing word, the insinuating word, the word that leads the trembling hand to the forbidden key. The Word beyond the door, the word that waits to be unlocked, the word springing out of censure, the word that cracks the font. The Word that does not bring peace but a sword. The word whose solace is salt from the rock. The word that does not repent. (*AL* 55)

Within this reference the ‘w’ of word shifts from upper to lower case seemingly liberally, but mostly ‘the Word’ is the censorious one which belongs to the Church that has burnt her works. Sappho’s ‘word’ “cracks the font” and “does not repent” and breaks the rules by daring to love another of the same sex, and is of course a word written by a woman. As an historical figure Sappho has empowered language by threatening the Church enough for this institution to see her as a danger. Sappho’s name is a by-word for lesbian love which legally and theologically has remained unrecognised and therefore her words have not counted except as a threat. The loves the words speak about challenge an institution. Her anger, as expressed in capitals in

the following question, “WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH MY POEMS?” betrays the novel’s overriding concern with mistreatment and injustice, which Burns and Duncker have discussed (*AL* 51). Her words have been destroyed because they were perceived as heretical and the memory of her is used in the novel as a voice from the past that will not be quietened. The double-edged power of the Word and the word is Sappho’s fixation: “day and night stretch before the word, hunger and cold mock it, but the Word itself is day and the Word itself is night” (*AL* 55). The capitalised ‘Word’ is now Sappho’s and it is as though she is demanding that if others have employed language as a means for power then so can she.

The abuse of the word is also seen to exist in the contemporary life that Sappho has entered into in the novel. This is where Handel and Sappho appear to argue from similar positions, because popular culture is not enjoyed by either character. At least with the “Bible and Law” language was “ennobling”, and there is still optimism for Sappho that “Art defeats Time” (*AL* 67). This is apparent in the imitation of a radio message: “Sappho to Mrs Woolf. Mrs Woolf to Sappho. The Over-and-Out across time, the two-way radio on a secret frequency” (*AL* 67). This is not only Art that is being discussed in this reference, but also specifically two women writers who refuse the boundaries set by those around them. The optimism in the Woolf/Sappho tie is tempered by the knowledge that language is both an artificial medium and the only one available: “It isn’t natural, language, nothing of nature in it, why pretend it is so?” (*AL* 138). This quotation is from Sappho’s second chapter and she insists on the artificiality of language whilst stressing the necessity of taking care with how words are used: “I know that the straightest way to come at my emotions is by the unluckiest route. Not sincerity of emotion but sincerity of form will take me there” (*AL* 138). Language and the word are understood as being open to freshness, which is

heightened when remembering that it is Sappho who is insisting on this point and she is over two thousand years old. Sappho's voice resembles Winterson's in *Art Objects*. Sappho realises the poststructuralist notion that language is constitutive, but also says let us as agents make the most of it. To say 'I love you' is still a quotation, as it is in *Written on the Body*, but Sappho also desires that other words might be found to bring this cliché back to life:

I love you. Those words were not worn out two thousand six hundred years ago. Are they worn out now? Perhaps, but not by repetition, but by strain. There are other ways of saying what I mean. Other words fit for the weight. Other words that pin me to an honesty I might not like. So much can be hidden in 'I love you'. I can hide in that sentimental cloud. I will not hide. (*AL* 139)

The 'you' Sappho is addressing is, or appears to be, Picasso, who needs words other than 'I love you' because Matthew said this to her whilst raping her. They are tainted by the abuse he inflicted on her. Matthew defies the notion that words control the user and instead he inflicts them on her as another part of his arsenal. The emotions attached to the words are the problem. The lie of love in this case exacts more pain on top of the physical abuse: "'I love you', her brother had said, when he was thirteen and she was nine. 'I love you'" (*AL* 153). Picasso continues, "I love you. The magic bullet that kills the victim and frees the murderer in a single shot" (*AL* 153). The words make Picasso the victim and place all the blame for her abuse on her. The power of 'love' means that this terrible crime can be committed because love the panacea is used to explain it away. Love as natural, rather than a construct or artificial as Sappho views language, holds the same measure of control as when one understands 'feminine' or 'masculine' as natural. The excuse of biological

determinism has historically allowed for prejudice. Sappho's artificiality argument when extended to 'love' does not permit love to be used as a weapon because it is revealing that it is not a pre-given. Instead, care has to be taken with this word. 'Love' is not biologically essential and it has to be deserved. This is the message received on reading Picasso's segments in the light of Sappho's defence of art and language.

Picasso's rage against the misuse of 'love' extends beyond Matthew as she pulls apart the fabric of the nuclear, bourgeois family: "I love you. The murder weapon of family life" (*AL* 154); mother and father are criticised as well. When her mother says the magic 'I love you' words to Picasso the effect is that of a knife to the heart (*AL* 154). She understands her mother as metaphorically looking for blood because the words are enough to wound the daughter physically. This rage is the strongest in a Winterson novel for examining the impact of emotional blackmail implicit in the language of love and because of this *Art and Lies* is the closest to exposing the negative power available to these words. These same words are related to the discourse of romantic fiction which promises true love to those who claim to love another but have now become instrumental in controlling that object of desire. The possibilities of performing hypocritically when saying 'I love you' are exposed.

Handel detests the commercialisation of love that masquerades as romance. It is implied that this is the same version that has silenced Picasso. Handel reads romance, as promulgated in the newspapers, as a necessary antidote to the horrendous stories they tell on other pages which "poison the heart" with "their daily doses of world malaise" (*AL* 13). According to Handel, the newspapers have created their own need for romance as a balance to their reports of atrocities: "What's left? Romance. Love's counterfeit free of charge to all. Fall into my arms and the world with its sorrows will shrink up into a tiny ball" (*AL* 14). Handel goes on to argue that romance, the

“favourite antidote”, fosters apathy. This reflects Handel’s fear of attachment as this characterises his outlook through the novel. It also critiques what has been evident in other works by Winterson such as *The Passion*. Winterson may also be understood as offering an antidote to the standardised romantic format as *Art and Lies* counteracts it with its attack by Handel and Picasso.

The overuse of ‘I love you’, perhaps the most romantic thing one can say, allows it to become both a poison and an antidote. Picasso’s response to her poisonous abuse is to paint everything around her including her family. Language has disappointed her and she reverts to the pre-Symbolic to communicate. Not so much “sulking in the face of history”, as Kristeva would have it in ‘About Chinese Women’, but as a desperate measure (156). Picasso only has colour left after feeling betrayed by language and her response acts as a safety valve, enabling mental and physical release.

Sappho offers Picasso a note with the word ‘Victory’ on it on finding her in the snow after her father pushed her from the roof. Sappho is the one who still has faith in language and this word further inspires Picasso to sever ties with her family. Burns also interprets this note as a catalyst for rebellion: “Her artistry finally breaks out some months after her “suicide” attempt, when she has returned home”, and thinks of the note of “inspiration” (383). Sappho’s continued faith in the word is after all inspirational. Her works have been burnt, her biographers have betrayed or re-written her life into another story, yet she still hopes that language, or art or love, will be capable of carrying the reader further:

I’m no Freudian. What is remembered is not a deed in stone but a metaphor. Meta = above. Pherein = to carry. That which is carried above the literalness of life. A way of thinking that avoids the problems of

gravity. The word won't let me down. The single word that can release me from all that unuttered weight. (*AL* 137)

Sappho's word, 'victory', literally releases Picasso and the word metaphor, when meaning carrying above, helps both women. Burns interprets this as such: "Repeatedly Sappho invokes the power of the word as a transubstantiation; it even lifts up Sappho's body as she jumps off the cliff" (371). The passage that Burns refers to in *Art and Lies* may also be read as talking about 'you' (Picasso) as well as Sappho's fabled suicidal leap for her male lover. The physical world cannot hold Picasso or Sappho down. Art, it is implied, can release them from the banal and from cruelty. This reading of these characters conforms to a feminist approach that interprets them as liberating themselves from the values that have subjugated them. Language has now become a means to assist liberation and consequently 'I love you' need not restrict.

The transformative power of art and love corresponds to *Art Objects'* reasoning but it is slightly less optimistic in *Art and Lies*. This is mainly because of the relationship between the Cardinal and Handel and because of the novel's ambiguous ending. The main protagonists have left their pasts behind and have been on a train journey. It is never stated clearly but there are hints that these three have approached their own judgement days either literally or figuratively. In the beginning of the final chapter there are distinct clues that the train they are all escaping on has crashed: "The man lay with his head propped on the book. The back of his skull felt hot, not hot and sticky as his forehead did, but as though his head had been packed with embers. There were ashes in his mouth" (*AL* 171). Judgement day or not, they have to begin again, even though those around them have not altered. They are the misfits, the Others in society who have left the city behind. Their escape is a limited freedom because those

around them, such as the male doctors that Handel has worked with, have not had to face their Judgements yet. The outsiders remain outside even though *Art and Lies* may on the whole be considered to end on an uplifting note. Handel's transformation, for example, at least allows for his figurative redemption from a life without emotion, even if others are not 'saved'.

Handel recognises that language is not natural and, like Sappho and Picasso, he eventually relishes this: "But language is artifice. The human being is artificial. None of us is Rousseau Man, that noble savage, honest and untrained" (*AL* 184). Handel is constructed in the novel as 'highbrow'. The above quotation places Handel as a character who is aware that humans are constructs and because of this they are also open to a transformation for the better:

The world of everyday experience is a world of redundant form. Form coarsened, cheapened, made easy and comfortable, the hackneyed and the clichéd, not what is found but what is lost. Invention then would return us to forms not killed through too much use. Art does it. And I? Why should I not live the art I love? (*AL* 199)

The art that Handel loves appears to be the only form that he has come close to experiencing emotions for as an adult. He critiques the overuse of familiar forms, the overuse of words like 'love', but aspires to or is perhaps inspired by it at the same time. He loves opera, as is exemplified by the novel closing with the score for 'Der Rosenkavalier'. The score communicates without words and thus avoids the clichés, just as Picasso's colours escape the lies and deceptions of her family life. Music and colours reach into the dramatic and touch without resorting to words and consequently the escape from the clichés that cause the narrator of *Written on the Body* so many problems is made possible.

'Der Rosenkavalier' relates to the Cardinal because its story revolves around the fear of ageing and of being usurped by a younger lover. This summary makes the love story an old one, timeless even. Because it is an opera it becomes new in terms of having high art status, unlike the notion of counterfeit that Handel implies popular culture is. Handel represents an art lover who, like Sappho, could have narrated *Art Objects*, which confirms Winterson's view that high art is special. *Art and Lies* stands against popular culture, as *Art Objects* tends to, but Handel is also a construct of his upbringing and this message filters across the novel. As a schoolboy he was groomed to appreciate the fine arts and his recourse to song after leaving the train suggests that he finally reconciles himself with his past as the novel ends.

Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse* recognises that 'I-love-you' is beyond language yet still within it: "We might call it a proffering, which has no scientific place: I-love-you belongs neither in the realm of linguistics nor in that of semiology. Its occasion (the point of departure for speaking it) would be, rather, Music" (149). The music of the score and Handel's return to singing at the end of the novel suggests a reading with Barthes, rather than against. For Handel music expresses the proffering of love that the clichés of counterfeit romance have failed to do. Barthes' appreciation of the paradox of the lover's discourse continues thus: "orgasm is not spoken, but it speaks and it says: I-love-you" (149). Barthes concludes this section by realising that saying I-love-you is "working without a net" (154), and language recognises this. Saying I-love-you means rising above the ordinary for Barthes, Handel and Sappho. It also suggests taking a risk, as it does in *The Passion*. Without the net there is the chance that there will be no reciprocation. When Matthew says 'I love you' to Picasso the rules change because Matthew does not need the words to be accepted. They are

devoid of emotion and have been plagiarised from their context to induce fear and compliance.

The Book

A book on the train unites the three main narrators of *Art and Lies* as they all read segments of it. This book is also the means by which Doll Sneerpiece, the bawd of the subtitle, is introduced into the main narrative. Lorna Sage's review of *Art and Lies* finds that Doll is the link between *Sexing the Cherry* and this later novel, and picks out the elements that give it strength:

Two things give this exiguous structure the touch of illusionism necessary to keep the show on the road: a fourth character which Winterson has plagiarized largely from herself, a seventeenth century bawd who is reminiscent of the splendid Dog-Woman in *Sexing the Cherry*; and, lurking under the surface, a dystopian scenario about the decay of the city into a mire of beggary, brutality and cold charity, and the decay of the family and "home" into a prison of incest and sexual abuse. (22)

It could also be argued that the book, which is a gift from the Cardinal to Handel, and is where Handel puts his love letter when he has finished reading it, also 'keeps the show on the road'. The motifs of language, letter, word and book, circulate in the novel emphasising how self-consciously vital language is to the novel's structure. Handel's book is an eclectic gathering of writings from across time: "The leaves had been cut and bound and new pages had been added to the book as it made its strange way down stranger centuries" (*AL* 203). *Art and Lies* mimics this book's structure as it moves back and forth through the centuries apparently at random. The following is a description of the book within the book and it is noticeable that *Art and Lies* bears a

partial resemblance to it: “The work had not been arranged chronologically; those who had owned it, and through whose hands it had passed, had each left their contribution, as writer, scholar, critic, eccentric, collector, and each according to temperament and passion. The book owed nothing to the clock” (*AL* 203). The aesthetic value of the novel rises in this comparison, as intertexts such as Sappho’s writings are included, just as they are in Handel’s book. The overt similarities between Winterson’s novel and Handel’s gift are that they are constructed in opposition to linearity and are both dependent on the concept of the merit of art as untruthful.

On reading Doll’s exploits Handel says, “I shut the book against her cry. That was too purple and exotic for my taste” (*AL* 7). Handel admits to being “slightly cold” and is the reverse of Doll as she attempts to seduce Ruggiero. For Doll, ““a book is nothing to me but a box of dainty handkerchiefs to wipe myself against once off the pot”” (*AL* 6). This supports my claim that Doll functions as a counterbalance but she is not strictly telling the truth because she later admits to reading Sappho, which ties together the appreciation of art across the centuries. This time it is without Handel’s class bias. Doll is a cipher for expressing how literature and art should be enjoyed. When she interrupts Handel’s narration she especially shines as an erotic, if not pornographic, counterpoint to one who is willing to put aside emotion. Her irreverence sexualises art where Handel cannot, and (literally) brings sensation back into reading: “She had found that by arching her bottom in a calculating manner, she could prop her forearms on the bed and continue to read undisturbed by the assaults on her hypotenuse. It was in this way that she had come to delight in the elevating works of Sappho” (*AL* 29).

In this reference it is clear that Doll prefers to read rather than work and that her work gets in the way of her pleasure. Heterosexual sex is not over-idealised and when Doll is reading Sappho there is the connotation that Sappho's words are more sexually stimulating than the men who pay to have sex with her. Doll is smitten with Ruggiero and pursues him to the point of dressing as a man and visiting a molly house where she expects him to be. Winterson uses cross-dressing again as a way for the lover to encounter his/her object of desire, as in *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*. This repetition reinforces how Winterson's version of love knows no boundaries and if there are any they can be overcome.

Ruggiero is the epitome of culture for Doll; she describes him as a "Walking Library" (6). His life's work is the impossible task of reconstructing an index of the manuscripts that were stored in the Great Library at Alexandria (*AL* 29). Doll rewrites his task and eroticises his passion:

And if I were to say that I would care to turn the pages of the gentleman one by one, and to run my fingers down his margins, and to decipher his smooth spine, and to go on my knees to enjoy his lower titles, and to upturn that one long volume that he keeps so secret to himself, what would you say? (*AL* 6)

She wishes she were a book so that Ruggiero would touch her, "I repent that I was not born a book and comfortable in your library right now Sir, this very morning" (*AL* 7). Apart from acting as light relief from the other narrators' anguish, Doll is also a carnivalesque figure because for her all aspects of living are there to be enjoyed. She is from a different century and this makes it simpler for her to function as a character that highlights the dryness of contemporary *Art and Lies*. She counteracts the harshness of the city at the turn of the twentieth century, where love and lust have

become twisted away from Doll's straightforward view of pleasure. The train is the means of escape from the city and as such persuades the reader that for Handel, Picasso and Sappho the present is corrupt and must be left behind. Doll exemplifies how the senses need not be beholden to others' whims and that it is possible to assume a position of authority. She symbolises a movement away from seeing love only as a discourse because she is a cipher for demonstrating that loving somebody is an elemental part of being human. The fragmented discourse, which is *Art and Lies*, makes it difficult to unite all four narrators' voices into one comprehensible whole and to do so would be a misreading. Doll necessarily stands outside the others' experiences to magnify how the city has altered for the worst. On the other hand, Sappho's presence in both landscapes tends to re-affirm the previously mentioned reference that Art is timeless and subsequently unites readers across time.

Handel describes this book in which Doll appears as unfinished (*AL* 204). When Handel finally explains the origins of the book it is exposed how the Cardinal sent the book with love. It is a collection of either real or fake writings by famous writers across the centuries. They are potentially inauthentic because Handel recalls how the Cardinal doctored texts that were in the Church's possession. The book was bequeathed to Handel and, like his pseudonym, it is a remnant from the past. It is also a token of love that Handel believes came too late. Picasso reassures Handel though that it is not too late, and Sappho states, "the word returns in love" (*AL* 205). Handel appears to gain strength from this: "His past, his life, not fragments nor fragmented now, but a long curve of movement that he began to recognise" (*AL* 206). As a castrato he has been physically fragmented but resolution appears in these final pages as Handel begins to sing and so uses the 'gift' of castrato that the Cardinal has given him. Sappho's optimistic faith in love enables Handel to use his voice. One can

assume that Handel is emotionally whole again as he sings: “His voice was strong and light. The sun was under his tongue. He was a man of infinite space” (AL 206). He takes his book with him, and it becomes a talisman of sorts, somewhat like Jeanette’s pebble and the gold chain that Domino gives Henri in *The Passion*: “The Book; fabulous, unlikely, beyond wealth, a talisman against time, an inventing and a remembrance” (AL 202). The word and the book are, according to Sappho, love. Amidst the anger of the three escapees in the present, optimism is drawn from the passing of time and from the relics of the past that have been re-written, such as Sappho, Handel and even Picasso. Art appears to be able to transcend time and equally so does love.

When Handel’s mother dies the book metaphor is re-employed to highlight how life is a story in *Art and Lies*. Death is drawn upon to insist that endings occur, whereas in *Written on the Body* death and grieving are portrayed as eternal. By comparing his mother’s life with a book Handel also paradoxically declares how everything is a text: “I had washed the body; her skin delicate death-blue, the joints not swollen now, all repose, easy to read the steel-nibbed lines that covered her in gentle calligraphy. The book of my mother finished and closed” (AL 116). Handel is also obliquely referring to the Book of Life in Revelations where, if anyone’s name is not found to be written down, “he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Revelations 20:15). This is another reference to judgement day and indicates once more how closely linked *Art and Lies* is to the New Testament. Sappho’s re-writing of John’s ‘In the beginning...’ is continued and magnified as Handel’s religiosity surfaces to depict his mother’s death. Biblical subtexts are a Winterson trademark and are the threads from the past that she never completely severs. The brand is specifically Christian and *Art and Lies* emphasises this with the final positivity of the ending as good overcomes

evil and a new day begins. Handel's past as a priest also signifies that his earlier education in belief in the 'truth' has not vanished either.

The motif of writing on the body and ageing also appears earlier when Sappho compared the lines on her face to various poetic forms: "The lines around my eyes are in terza rima, three above, three below. There is a quatrain at my chin and a sonnet on each breast, Villanelle is the poise of my hands (Thankfully, there is still no trace of vers libre)" (*AL* 63). Apart from the parallels that can be drawn with other Winterson novels, such as *The Passion* (with Villanelle) and actual writing on the body echoing the title *Written on the Body*, the connection between the body and the word in *Art and Lies* is distilled into language's association with the passing of time, and the signature age leaves behind. As with *Sexing the Cherry's* Dog-Woman, *Art and Lies* looks at the end of the twentieth century with the assistance of a centuries old character thus challenging the notion of progress.

For Handel the book is a metaphor for his mother's life, just as poetry is for Sappho's, and the accumulation of time marks how the lines can be read as depositories of knowledge rather than an aesthetically negative attribute. Handel may also be read as having led his life like a closed book, both secretively and as dead as his mother. When he sings at the end of *Art and Lies* he manages to re-unite with the world after having being distanced from it for so long. He is living in the present whilst holding the book the Cardinal left him. Textuality has become everything, including his mother's life and the music he performs to. From this perspective language determines the ending because it describes it. *Art and Lies* is preoccupied with the impact of words and literature on the senses and takes an equivocal view that words, particularly 'I love you', can be both destructive and uplifting. The recurring book motif, which features Doll's exploits and Sappho's writing, enables the

characters and literature to unite across time, even if it is only united in its eclecticism.

The necessity of illusionism that Sage finds in *Art and Lies* explains Handel's discussion about art with a friend, a scene that relies heavily upon the dialogue between Cyril and Vivian in Oscar Wilde's 'The Decay of Lying'. Handel's friend cannot understand why Handel loves opera as he thinks the music is "so artificial" (AL 185). Handel's defence rests on arguing that, "art is not supposed to be natural" (AL 185). Winterson goes on to lift, almost verbatim, the passage from 'The Decay of Lying' where Vivian (or Handel in *Art and Lies*) has questioned Hamlet's sanity in the suggestion that Art holds a mirror up to Nature. Wilde's Vivian has this to say: "...whatever you may say, it is merely a dramatic utterance, and no more represents Shakespeare's real views upon art than the speeches of Iago represent his real views upon morals" (1082). Handel's remonstrance to his friend is almost identical to Vivian's argument: "A single dramatic utterance of Hamlet's is no more Shakespeare's own view of art, than the speeches of Iago are his own views on morals. Read *The Tempest* and then tell me that art is the mirror of life" (AL 185). This cutting and pasting of Wilde's words magnifies *Art and Lies*' interest in the division between truth and art, and refuses, like Wilde, to accept the appropriateness of understanding art as secondary to nature. Shakespeare's own view of art is difficult to interpret, but Winterson's strategy of inserting 'The Decay of Lying' directly into the novel supports her pointed critique of realism in *Art Objects*. It also vindicates her writing trajectory that shifts more and more away from realism. *Art and Lies* consistently remarks on the artificiality of language, as all three of the main narrators realise the truth of this.

Wilde's disorientating claim that life mirrors art can also be traced in other aspects of *Art and Lies*. When Sappho asks, "Which comes first? The muser or the Muse?" (AL 140), Lacanian and deconstructive readings may be put aside temporarily in order to correlate the question with the way 'The Decay of Lying' destabilises commonsensical notions of art and nature. The book that the Cardinal gives to Handel symbolises most evidently Winterson and Wilde's justification of lying for art's sake, but Winterson's insertion of Christian values does not allow one to read *Art and Lies* as merely a later version of Wilde's essay. Kate Kellaway has noted Wilde's influence on *The Powerbook* when comparing Winterson's novel favourably with *The Selfish Giant* in her review 'She's Got the Power': "The Christian overtone recalls Oscar Wilde's *The Selfish Giant* and although her wit is not Wildean (it is all her own), she does share his romantic, quasi-religious morbidity. She knows what lovers are up against" (11). As far as 'The Decay of Lying' and *Art and Lies* are concerned, it appears that *Art and Lies* is reluctant to be quite so ironically damning about truth. The novel's culmination in intimations of salvation, as Handel sings and Picasso and Sappho stand together and look over the cliff-head, suggest that the Christian version of truth and good dominating over evil cannot be fully left behind. The value of Agape is included as *Art and Lies* dips into the New Testament. The institutions that support Christianity are without doubt under extreme attack in this novel but the underlying tenet of loving thy neighbour as thyself and the forgiveness of Handel's sins proclaim a philosophical sub-text of Agape. Because of this tendency towards Christian love as the moral high ground *Art and Lies* never fully succumbs to Wilde's version of art and lies.

Conclusively, *Art and Lies* is a novel about language and love. Its strongest theme is that language is powerful and can shape the way we think about life and love. It

also simultaneously queries the contemporary misuse of words, letters and books as it posits that language like love should be treated as a reverential object. We read *Written on the Body* and *Art and Lies* together their interest in exposing the falsity of fixed meanings becomes apparent. These two novels are connected because of their distrust of linearity and because of their faith in the arbitrariness of meaning. *Art and Lies*' structure pushes further than *Written on the Body* in its desire to escape predictable narrative techniques. However, in its experimentation its prescriptive message of faith in love and high art becomes all the more pronounced.

Love and art are the final signifiers in *Art and Lies*. They halt the slippage of meaning in a text that appears to embrace poststructuralist thought. As with Lacanian theory the slippage in this novel is finite rather than infinite. Love and art are the phallic signifiers as these are the terms that defy deconstruction. This is evident to varying degrees in other novels by Winterson, but in *Art and Lies* this becomes most apparent in the contrasts between the form, content, and the subtext that reveres love without abuse. The final enactment of judgement day for the three main characters reinforces the redemptive aspect of Wintersonian love.

Chapter Six
Cheating Hearts

Gut Symmetries

To marry and to make a vow to love somebody forever, till death do you part, is to confirm that love in front of witnesses. Winterson is often thematically concerned in her novels with the breaking of this vow. She recurrently examines adultery as her characters often favour it over a loveless marriage. Marriage is constantly questioned and destabilised because of its association with the institutionalisation of relationships and with its connections with the normalising of heterosexuality. In this chapter the themes of adultery and faithfulness in *Gut Symmetries* are analysed in three categories in accordance with the triangle of lovers that Winterson relies upon so often in her work. These categories are: the search for love, truth and lies, and triangulated desire. Romantic fiction, and the delusions that this genre maintains, is another connected area of interest (specifically in relation to truth and lies) because it genders the debate surrounding truth-telling. This gendered perspective infiltrates the triangle of two females and a male that Winterson employs, because it is a means of displacing the traditional triangle of literature where two males are rivals for the female object of desire.

The reliability of truth is of intrinsic importance to the theme of adultery, as this theme depends on lies being told to the one who is cuckolded. *Art and Lies*, *Art Objects* and *Gut Symmetries* together form a triad of texts that distinguish art from deception, and true love from marriage. These texts combine to form the core of Winterson's code for acceptable lying. *Art Objects*, for instance, stands against

realism in defence of romanticism and modernism. Art can never mirror life for Winterson and her essays and novels are consistent with this philosophy. The title *Art and Lies* divides art from deception and this is reiterated in the respective difference between Picasso's and her father's taste in art. His preference for realism categorises him as abhorrent when read alongside his attempt to murder his daughter. Realism is a Wintersonian parallel for the institution of marriage, because both are a 'sham' version of the idealised object. As Nicci Gerard suggests, Winterson increasingly unshackles her writing from realism.¹ I agree with Gerard's perception, but dislike both the pejorative tone she assumes and the implication that Winterson was at one point a purveyor of purely realist fiction. There is an insistence in Winterson's writing that is noticeable as one follows her novels chronologically from *Oranges* onwards that claims this mode is a mockery of art as much as an unhappy marriage is a degraded version of 'true' love.

'True' art is recognised in *Art Objects* as, "a construct, like science, like religion, like the world itself. It is as artificial as you and me and as natural too" (AO 117). A comparable argument is also evident in *Art and Lies*. Lorna Sage's *The Cambridge Guide to Women's Writing in English* describes Winterson as becoming "increasingly impatient" with realism (673), and this impatience may be measured as an increased search for honesty. Both art and love are recognised as artificial by Winterson. They are also written of as vital. Winterson's twin idealisation of love and art suggests a Platonic search for the ideal. They are revered by her and the search for 'true' art and love entails ascendancy, as though both are morally improving.

The moral paradox of Winterson's search for truth is that lying, in the form of adultery, repeatedly colours her work. Romancing, as in telling stories and as

¹ As quoted in chapter four of this thesis.

seduction, is indulged in self-consciously in her writing. Mario Vargas Llosa in *Fiction: The Power of Lies* argues for a distinction between truth and lies in relation to the 'good' novel: "Every good novel tells the truth and every bad novel lies. For a novel 'to tell the truth' means to make the reader live an illusion and 'to lie' means the novel is unable to accomplish that illusion" (4). Llosa appears to be proposing a re-thinking of truth and lies, not as strongly as Wilde's 'The Decay of Lying', but in a similar vein of demanding that effective fiction maintains an illusion. Llosa is perhaps closer to Winterson than Wilde, as Winterson never quite releases her writing from the moral subtext of the Christian ethics that requires one to tell the truth. Realism for her is a lie as far as art is concerned, and the style of her novels upholds this view. Realism is the denigrated art world's version of deception, according to Winterson. In terms of relationships, the unhappy marriage is the deception that she conclusively critiques rather than adultery.

Infidelity occurs in the other novels by Winterson, but *Gut Symmetries* is the one that draws directly upon triangulated desire to schematise its construction with the voices of the wife Stella, her husband Jove and their mistress Alice. All of the novels detail the unhappy marriage as conformist and together the criticism that they aim at this institution is resounding. The stories of the twelve dancing princesses of *Sexing the Cherry* are just one example. By having marriage as a foil and a representative for compulsory heterosexuality the idealised version of love, which occurs time and again in the love affair between two women, is given greater value. Marriage is depicted as the conformist relationship, which is balanced against the worthier one where 'true' love prevails. Winterson's triangles offer up the symmetry of the title in order to outweigh texts which refuse to make lesbian desire visible.

The Search for Love

Platonic love is invoked whenever the ideal of perfect love is broached. *Gut Symmetries*' strongest leaning towards Plato's *Symposium* occurs when symmetry and unity are explored thus: "It may be that in our provisional world of dualities and oppositional pairs: black/white, good/evil, male/female, conscious/unconscious, Heaven/Hell, predatory/prey, we compulsively act out the drama of our beginning, when what was whole, halved, and seeks again wholeness" (GS 4). This passage overtly recalls Aristophanes rather than Socrates (in the *Symposium*), particularly in the search for wholeness. As may be seen, Aristophanes' explanation as to why there is such an emotion as innate love closely resembles the above quotation from *Gut Symmetries*: "It brings us back to our original state, trying to reunite us and restore us to our true human form" (*Symposium* 23). He continues: "We're all looking for our 'other half'", "and the name of this desire and pursuit of completeness is Eros, or love" (23). The idea of the search for love is used whenever Winterson writes about adultery, because by definition adultery insists on undermining the unhappy marriage. It is a potential escape route and is a means to finding Aristophanes' dream of the 'other half'.

Further to this, the instability of Aristophanes' hermaphrodites metaphorically emphasises the quantum theories that appear in *Gut Symmetries*: "Every quantum experiment conducted has shown, again and again, with dismaying mischief, that particles can hold positions contradictory and simultaneous" (GS 160). The spectre of Aristophanes' hermaphrodite also repeats Winterson's general interest in disturbing binary thinking, which begins in *Oranges*. The binary of husband and wife is undermined by the allusion to the *Symposium* and by *Gut Symmetries*' interest in the mischief of quantum experiments. Doan prescribes that a lesbian writer should be

exploding binaries, and criticises *Oranges* for only exposing oppositionary thinking. Doan's prescription is disputable, but she is correct in arguing that after *Oranges* Winterson finds the means to deconstruct the binaries more obviously (145). *Gut Symmetries* (and *Written on the Body* and *Sexing the Cherry*) dismantle the binary more thoroughly with their flirtations with the third term rather than the couple. In *Sexing the Cherry* grafting is, as Doan also points out, a useful metaphor for exploring hybridity, and for suggesting the possibilities of a third sex. The narrator of *Written on the Body* is another device that deconstructs the binary of male and female. In *Gut Symmetries* the binary, or rather the couple, is disturbed by the allusions to quantum physics, with the oblique references to the *Symposium*, and by the introduction of Alice who is the third term.

As in *Written on the Body*, nothing is fixed or certain in *Gut Symmetries* except the underlying knowledge that there is such an emotion as perfect love. After Alice's father has died and whilst she is still grieving Alice holds on to love as the one certainty that is left: "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends" (*GS* 164). This extract is taken verbatim from St. Paul's Corinthians and is yet another example of Winterson's intertextualisation of the New Testament. Winterson's idealisation of love depends on both Eros and Agape in its embrace of a generic form of love that strives for unification. The Christian subtext of idealising love is observable in this novel despite the portrayal of unfaithfulness and this is combined with the Platonic search once more. This is 'once more' because the combination of different types of love recurs in all of Winterson's work. The scientific discourses, the mysticism that Stella's father invests his life in, and the relationships between the three narrators all collude to question stasis, fidelity and a regimented understanding of love. Love is separated from the institutions that

Winterson freely attacks, even when an institution such as Christianity is utilised to express Alice's continued faith in love.

Whilst undermining marriage, Winterson simultaneously exposes the dangers that idealised love is under from external forces. The institution of marriage is never free from criticism in her writing, but the fear of disruption is a concern. Marriage is criticised when it is a poor imitation of the 'real thing'. The love between a couple is, however, still idealised and the first sentence of *Gut Symmetries* depends on the reader realising this: "It began on a boat, like *The Tempest*, like *Moby Dick*, a finite enclosure of floating space, a model of the world in little" (*GS* 9).

This reference to *Moby Dick* at the beginning of *Gut Symmetries* continues later with the emergence of Captain Ahab and Ishmael towards the end of this novel. *Moby Dick's* theme of searching is used by Winterson throughout this novel and others, such as *The Passion*, where searching is referenced by allusions to the Holy Grail. *Moby Dick* epitomises the hungry desire that provokes the search for the Other. It also represents the penalties associated with this endless searching. The references to it symmetrically balance *Gut Symmetries* because it limits the idealisation of the search for love.

"Insulated" and "vulnerable" is how Alice continues to describe her reaction to her voyage at the beginning of *Gut Symmetries* (*GS* 9). With little difficulty this may be interpreted as a metaphor for describing how it feels to be in a relationship with another person: "This is us, vulnerable, insulated, entirely self-contained yet altogether at the mercy of the elements. The Ship of Fools is sailing tonight and all of us are aboard" (*GS* 9). This figuratively depicts the fragility of being in a couple when there is the uncertainty of an interloper coming between the two. The 'finite closure' implied in being married or in vowing to love only one another forever is as fragile as

the boat at sea that Jove and Stella find themselves on at the end of the novel. This is reminiscent of *Written on the Body*, where marriage is “the flimsiest weapon against desire” (*W* 78).

Alice’s allusion to the Ship of Fools highlights the folly and pleasure of the search for true love that Alice enters into in her relationship with Jove. True love becomes the Holy Grail as Alice’s romance with both him and Stella is compared to being on this Ship. Love is idealised whilst it is simultaneously recognised as madness to embark on a search for that which cannot be found.

The negativity surrounding the desire to search for love is most apparent in Stella’s sense of betrayal. She is the first person in the love triangle to be let down by another and her reaction to the news is paradigmatic for one who is in mourning. This point is illuminated when realising that her grief replays *Written on the Body*’s theme of the loss of a loved one. The depiction of Stella’s torment means that marriage as such is not always an enemy in Winterson’s work. The consequences of infidelity are intrinsic to chapter two of *Gut Symmetries* as Stella narrates her emotional and physical reaction to the discovery that her husband has a mistress: “Pain is as total as a lover. I thought of those eighteenth-century engravings, German, where Death in his hood courts living flesh. This death is as obscene. The pictures in my head are sex and sex” (*GS* 36). The sex that Stella envisions is the three of them, “there we are, the infernal triangle, turning in the lubricious air, breasts, cock, cunt, oversized inflated parachutes of skin” (*GS* 37). She also compares herself to the Fisher King whose wounds become him and will not heal (*GS* 37). With the broken promise of love, Stella reacts physically, much as Jacqueline does against the narrator in *Written on the Body*, as she wrecks the marital home in response to being deceived.

This darker aspect of adultery questions the urge for instability. The warning against three rather than two is also implicit in the story called 'The Three Friends'. This is inserted into *Gut Symmetries* without any introduction and is also included in Winterson's short story collection, *The World and Other Places*. These three friends travel in search of "that which cannot be found" (GS 140). The tale ends with the Grim Reaper finding them, implying that such endless restlessness has its drawbacks too. Eros and Winterson's theme of necessary searching are restrained by the inclusion of this allegory as well as the initial reference to *Moby Dick* and by Stella's reaction to her husband's infidelity.

Eros influences Winterson's recurrent adoption of adultery as a theme, more so than Agape, because of the motif of searching. As Nygren explains, Eros is an 'egocentric' rather than 'theocentric' kind of loving: "Eros is the soul's homesickness, its longing for what can give it true satisfaction, at once the mark of its nobility and a symptom of its present humiliation, a testimony both that it belongs to higher existence and that in its present situation it painfully lacks that which by nature it needs" (235-236). The search for the grail, the folly of the Ship of Fools and the original Captain Ahab's mission are included in *Gut Symmetries* as tropes for a warning against the acquisitiveness of Eros. This may be understood as the underlying Christian Agape pushing through Winterson's writing. It also offers symmetry to the madness that desire as lack can induce. This theory is upheld when remembering that the allegory of 'The Three Friends' is placed in *Gut Symmetries* immediately after Alice realises the negative aspect of merging with another:

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. At the time I did not find this analogy sinister. (GS 139)

When Stella's grief is made evident as loss, and Alice begins to realise that Jove is behaving as if he actually is a God, the erotic triangle is converted into the infernal triangle that Stella becomes tormented by.

Stella takes refuge in the Bible when finding out about Jove's affair. Her sentiments are reminiscent of Jeanette in *Oranges* after discovering that she has been betrayed by her mother and Melanie. The Old Testament is relied upon by Stella, and less directly by Jeanette, in order to affirm a sense of loss. By doing so, they depend on a centuries-old detestation of breaking sacred vows to explain the impact of the withdrawal of love. Judas's kiss characterises betrayal in the West. It has been demonised into the ultimate sign of treachery and this is Stella's vehicle for relating the depths of her anguish: "To betray with a kiss. The reek of Judas. I took the brush to clean my teeth and thought of his mouth. Kiss of life, kiss of death. Come kiss me so that I can read your lips, deceptions scripted and waiting to be staged. His lying heart is in his mouth" (GS 39).

Truth and Lies

The friendly kiss, which veils murderous intent, is based on a lie and yet lying is also intrinsic to art. Winterson's self-conscious playing with the truth is present in *Oranges*, in particular in 'Deuteronomy' where the narrator briefs the reader on the relativity of historical 'fact'. In conjunction with this, Jeanette's nightmares about getting married in the main body of *Oranges* illustrate an earlier concern with making promises that are impossible to keep. Winterson is calling for an interrogation of fact whilst exposing the lies of institutionalised heterosexuality. *Oranges* deconstructs the

binary of truth and lies and this diminishes the respectability of institutionalised love. Adultery, and its accompanying lies, serves as a trope for art as Winterson's continued working ethos in her novels and essays depends on destabilising falsity. When Jeanette's mother and Melanie betray Jeanette the call for honesty is established. This desire for honesty is continued in *Art Objects* where it is implied that although art is based on a lie, 'good' art is true to the viewer and itself (AO 96).

This demand for art to be invested with faith, whilst simultaneously pointing out that art depends on fabrication for its viability, is encoded in the search for a 'true' love that can never exist. In an interview with Libby Brooks in *The Guardian*, Winterson asks for the truth of art to be considered:

I believe in art as the true means of not telling the truth. You're not setting out to deceive. You're setting out to find an ultimate reality. Lies are just lies. They're deceptions that you create for yourself or others, and most of us live our life in a lie from beginning to end, because it is comfortable.

(10)²

Jove and Stella's marriage becomes that comfortable lie, that trophy to polish (GS 40), and is therefore the one that is dismissed by Winterson's value system. Winterson understands a difference between not telling the truth and lying and places these in the hierarchy, which is so often relied upon in her work.

The lies that one tells oneself may otherwise be known as the gendering of the romantic dream. The reasoning behind Alice's attraction to Jove is that she is looking for the 'right' one. The readers are privy to viewing the full extent of Jove's machinations, such as forging Alice's signature, and can consequently measure how Alice betrays herself, or is at least self-deluding, with the following remark: "I am of

² Interviews with Winterson are entered under Winterson's name in the bibliography. This interview is entitled '*The Powerbook: The Power Surge*'.

the generation brought up on romance. Where is the one for me?" (*GS* 26). Alice's romantic idealism re-emerges in the chapter called Ten of Swords, which is incidentally the unluckiest tarot card in the pack. This is confined to Alice describing Jove and outlining the depths of her humiliation, where she admits that when Jove began to notice her she was "puppy-dog glad" (*GS* 103).

Later, the romantic fairy tale of their relationship is revealed as Alice states "I had been waiting for my prince to come" (*GS* 106). The next paragraph reveals that being with Jove offers "the cloak of invisibility" which is "conferred on coupledness" (*GS* 106). She is no longer Alice, "but Alice and Jove" (*GS* 106). The escape from being a single female is the foundation of Alice's relationship with Jove. Alice also reveals in this chapter that whilst being seen as a couple she experiences, "relief from the burden of myself" (*GS* 106). The 'romance' of merging one's identity with another's is one way of reading this quotation. It may also be understood that, as a single woman, Alice perceives that she does not have an identity, but gains one as a couple. The gendering of the romance tends to say the latter is truer. Alice's remark, "I thought he made me fully human. I did not think of us as one man and his dog", reaffirms the novel's interest in the schism between hope and material, phallogocentric reality (*GS* 104). This schism is reinforced on recognising that Alice's aspirations merge with Stella's when Stella explains that she knew she would fall in love with Jove on the day that she was born (*GS* 83). *Gut Symmetries* insists on highlighting the issues of dominance that are intrinsic to a heterosexual romantic love story.

Winterson has more recently voiced her opinion on women's infidelity, in her (as was) fortnightly column for the *Guardian*, in order to argue that feminism has had a positive effect on women's sexual autonomy:

To me, women having affairs means that women are sexually and socially confident. For untold centuries, women have endured bad marriages and male infidelity – never forget that the suffragist slogan was Votes for Women and Chastity for Men. Women seeking sexual pleasure or emotional fulfilment is an inevitable consequence of a shift in the dynamics of male/female relationships. Women may not have the power yet, but maybe we are losing our fear. ('What Planet' 7)

In this context women's infidelity within marriage is both an indicator that power is shifting away from male domination, and a consolation for historical inequity. This is a somewhat crude type of feminism that Winterson is adhering to, because it tends to universalise both sex and emotions as only historically male dominated. If, however, one accepts the existence of phallogentricity her stance is based on reasonable grounds. Winterson's female characters tend to be given the autonomy to love and to enjoy sex. Her writing supports her personal convictions in that the endurance of hopeless marriages is no longer as economically and socially necessary as it once was.

In *Desire*, Belsey debates how marriage is inherently frail because it rests on claims to fulfil desire when, by definition, this would be impossible because desire is founded on lack rather than unity:

Radically heterogeneous, even to itself, desire cannot be presented, made present. The vocabulary of true love, with its vows and contracts, its controls and complacencies, suppresses this heterogeneity, which returns as forbidden desire. Marriage, litigation, or the invocation of family values, offers what now seems only a precarious resolution. (75)

Belsey goes on to quote *Written on the Body*'s claim that "marriage is the flimsiest weapon against desire" as an example of the fallacy of the marriage vow. Marriage is

not so much under threat from women using adultery as a politicised weapon against the confines of heterosexuality as from the unlikelihood of marriage actually being happy. True love is impossible to achieve.

In a *Salon* interview Laura Miller asks Winterson why she is drawn to adultery so often: “Romantic triangles, particularly from the point of view of a woman having an affair with a married woman, seem to attract you as a theme. What makes you want to write books about this?” (2).³ This interview was conducted at the time of Winterson’s book tour for the release of *Gut Symmetries*. The question is instigated by the recurrence of the triangle, this time with Jove and Alice and Stella, and the secondary triangles made up of the relationship between Stella and Alice’s parents. The coincidence of Stella’s mother and Alice’s father having an affair, however unlikely, is a triangular diversion from the main protagonists and is a relief for the parents from their own unhappy marriages. The immorality associated with betrayal is weakened by its repetition and is a safety valve for maintaining the façade of a happy marriage rather than only being a portrayal of transgression against the law.

Winterson’s reply to Miller, as to why she uses the theme of adultery so often is as follows: “I like to look at how people work together when they are put into stressful situations, when life stops being cozy, when it stops being predictable, when there is a chance element which unsettles all the rules, which forces people back onto their own resources, and away from their habits” (2). The risk, which predominates in *The Passion*, is a focal point of Winterson’s work. The thrill of the unexpected, the dangers associated with breaking taboos, and the risks of succumbing to temptation, are all aspects of infidelity that Winterson takes pleasure in exposing.

³ This *Salon* interview, ‘Rogue Element’, is found at the website: <http://www.salon.com/april97/winterson970428.htm>. The interviews spans five pages and the quotations refer to these specifically.

The title of this interview with Miller, 'Rogue Element', refers to Winterson no doubt as well as her penchant for writing about the shattering of comfortable lies. Winterson continues: "Always in my books, I like to throw that rogue element into a stable situation and then see what happens" (2). This allusion to a chemistry experiment corresponds with Alison Sinclair's definition of adultery in *The Deceived Husband*: "In using the term 'adultery' then, we refer to a voluntary or wilful mixing of elements whereby some original element ceases to exist in its pure, or unadulterated, form" (Sinclair 47). Winterson is the self-styled alchemist who desires instability in the worlds she creates, and Sinclair's explanation of adultery supports this view.

Miller asks Winterson if Alice is the 'rogue element' for Stella and Jove, or if it is the other way round (3). Winterson does not answer this directly, but insists that Alice should not be seen as a victim (3). Winterson then goes on to criticise Jove and Stella: "There's a kind of smugness to them, which Alice completely detonates because she is the dangerous other who is out of control, because she is seeking and yearning. She is full of passion, and she will take huge risks emotionally" (3). Winterson's sympathy evidently rests with the outsider Alice, who might now be understood as not only a third point in a triangle, but also a symbol of the pleasure that Winterson takes in disruption.

But Alice is also characterised by her initial acceptance of the traditional romantic love story. She has a dual role in subverting yet maintaining the status quo and possibly has an equal in Jordan when he wanders into double-agency. Immediately prior to Alice claiming she is of the generation brought up on romance, she also

differentiates between sex and love, where love assumes a higher status in the hierarchy. It is possible to draw parallels with romantic fiction's idealisation of romantic love as opposed to sexual love:

The curious fact of love is that it overrides the body's rubber-sealed selfishness. Sex and procreation easily fit in with the body's plans for Empire; it wants to extend its territory, needs to reproduce itself. It resists invasion. Love the invader compromises the self's autonomy. Love the rescuer is the hand held out across the uncrossable sea. (*GS* 26)

Love both invades and rescues thematically in *Gut Symmetries*. Whereas Alice's love for Jove turns her into a sentient being, even though this is true only up to the point that she is seen as a person in a couple, her love for Stella begins with symmetry and ends in individuality. Alice is invaded by Jove's love, and rescued by Stella's. Whether Alice's love for Jove, or Stella, is illusory or not, the quotation above restates Winterson's preoccupation with love. Alice's interpretation of love resembles Henri's for Villanelle, Jordan's for Fortunata, and the narrator's for Louise in *Written on the Body*. This is because this emotion is regarded as the most valid. These lovers also desire to lose themselves in another. Alice's love is tinged with the romance of romantic fiction, as it is for other Winterson narrators. This romantic love that these characters share is also implicitly self-destructive.

Warnings from second wave feminists, such as Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, delineated the ideological trap that romantic fiction offers women. Alice's differentiation between love and sex stresses how she is a product of the lies that romantic fiction has promulgated. Stevi Jackson's 'Women and Heterosexual Love' outlines how writers such as de Beauvoir, Germaine Greer and Shulamith Firestone have in the past warned against the perils associated with love for women who live in

a patriarchal society (50). Jackson also spells out the gendering of romance and romantic fiction in Western culture and does so, in ‘Even Sociologists Fall in Love’, by maintaining that love should not be regarded simply as a patriarchal weapon. Jackson clarifies how masculinity and femininity (rather than males and females) have different relationships both with emotions and with the narrativization of love:

The narratives woven around love and romance are available to both women and men within our culture, but not equally so. Being constituted as feminine involves girls in discourses of feeling and emotion, and more specifically the culture of romance, from which boys are more often excluded or from which they exclude themselves in order to construct a sense of their own maleness. It is through the idiom of sexual bravado and conquest, not the language of romance, that masculinity is asserted.

(‘Even’ 215)

As much as Winterson wants Alice to be the charge to detonate Jove and Stella’s marriage, Alice’s desire for romance ties in with Jackson’s description of the gendering of emotions. The lack of symmetry that Jackson outlines in gender’s appropriation of love is quite distinct in the polarity between Alice and Jove’s expectations of relationships. Henri, Jordan and the gender-unspecified narrator of *Written on the Body* also share in Alice’s romantic dreams. Their love for romantic love demonstrates how Winterson is aware in her novels that masculinity and femininity are constructs, as much as love is. Believing in the promise of unity, which romantic love offers, is not decided by one’s biological sex, but by the discourses that masculinity and femininity are constructed to accept.

Triangulated Desires

Jove's characterisation depends on his misogyny. He is a scientist, similarly to Elgin in *Written on the Body*, and as opposed to his wife Stella who is a poet, which tends to emphasise his somewhat stereotypically villainous qualities. Grice and Woods' 'Grand (Dis)Unified Theories?' interprets the triangle of Jove, Stella and Alice as disappearing in the centre of the novel, "in favour of the logic of sameness" (Grice and Woods 124). The triangle dissolves as Jove becomes surplus, or rather the institution of marriage is held up as false and an extra-marital lesbian relationship becomes preferable: "Reflecting/mirroring in the sex scene between Alice and Stella works to both refuse the male gaze and to destroy the triangular structure of the novel" (Grice and Woods 124). Grice and Woods are not convinced by the narrative's triangular frame because they believe that Jove is an unconvincing stereotype of masculinity. For them, his characterisation weakens the credibility of the triangle. Grice and Woods also accuse *Gut Symmetries* of lapsing into "trite formulations", and into "some rather gendered stereotypes" (121). They particularly find fault with what they understand as the created gendered opposition between science and mysticism. This is somewhat unfair as Grice and Woods are not fully appreciating how Alice is a (female) scientist and that Stella's father is absorbed in (irrational) mysticism. If one refers back to Jackson's previously cited quotation, a defence of the portrayal of Jove may also inadvertently be found: "It is through the idiom of sexual bravado and conquest, not the language of romance, that masculinity is asserted" ('Even' 215).

Grice and Woods may have a justified point as far as stereotyping is concerned when one analyses the relationship between Alice and Stella in the light of Winterson's other novels. These often tend to esteem the love between two women over heterosexual coupling. This slightly tips the scales away from the normative,

heterosexual romantic discourse, but such tipping has become a little predictable within Winterson's oeuvre. *Gut Symmetries* is a little complicated at first as Alice's passion for Jove and Stella alternates between the two. Conclusively, though, she favours Stella, as may be seen in the following reference: "My first serious emotion was for a married man. My first experience of authentic desire was with a married woman" (GS 118). This makes clear the experience of the triangle for Alice as Jove is relegated to secondary importance.

Gut Symmetries does not settle for the Freudian explanation of homosexuality, of self falling in love with self, but there is a slight flirtation with this idea when Alice and Stella first make love: "The reflecting image of a woman with a woman is seductive. I enjoyed looking at her in a way that was forbidden to me, this self on self, self as desirer and desired, had a frankness to it I had not been invited to discover" (GS 119). The rest of this paragraph and the next continue to compare female body with female body as similar, or symmetrical, but finally asks: "Why then did I trouble the surface? It was not myself I fell in love with it was her" (GS 119). It is at this point that Alice experiences individuation and individuality, which she could not find with Jove. It is as though Freud's understanding of narcissism is accepted and re-appropriated into positivity, and Winterson's work is once more resonant of Rich's essay 'Compulsory Heterosexuality', in that the love between two women is written of as the norm.

Alice and Stella's similarities are echoed in their overlapping narratives and as Adam Mars-Jones and Michèle Roberts separately point out in their reviews of *Gut Symmetries*, it becomes difficult at times to distinguish between the two. The mystifying power of love is again the force which joins the two lovers, yet this time it is not the received idea of finding a prince. Instead, it is the resurfacing of

Winterson's theme of finding love unexpectedly, which is not always a lesbian relationship. It is comparable to Jeanette's explanation as to why she falls in love with Melanie, and why Henri falls in love with Napoleon. The protagonists have no control over this emotion, instead it controls them.

Despite the hints at pre-destination Jove is, nevertheless, the conduit for this erotic triangle. This stops him from assuming the role of hapless cuckold and also prevents the meeting of the two women becoming too preposterous because he manipulates the relationships by instigating the initial encounter between Alice and Stella with a forged letter. Alice describes Jove's scheme using the technical terms that he and she use professionally:

If you want to know how a mistress marriage works, ask a triangle. In Euclidean geometry the angles of a triangle add up to 180 degrees and parallel lines never meet. Everyone knows the score and the women are held in tension, away from one another. The shape is beguiling and it could be understood as a new geometry of family life. (*GS* 16)

Alice proceeds to undercut Euclid to argue how the separation of women is being overcome. Jove may have brought them together but the narrative barely belongs to him as Alice and Stella control the majority of this space: "Unfortunately, Euclidean theorems work only if space is flat. In curved space, the angles over-add themselves and parallel lines always meet. His wife, his mistress, met" (*GS* 17).

Jove's reasoning for pretending that he is Alice when writing to Stella, in order to let her know about the affair, is that he believes that he can master the situation: "A threesome? I suppose so. I wanted to see them together, myself as the invisible other", and continues, "I made the mistake of thinking I could control the experiment" (*GS* 193). As a scientist who has been working on Grand Unified Theories of the Gut of

the title, his work overlaps into his private life. Alice explains her understanding of this work as such, “GUTs had their heart in the right place; they wanted to recognise the true relationship between the three fundamental forces” (*GS* 97). This explains away Jove’s rationale for introducing his wife and mistress as being based on scientific exploration. His loss of control paradoxically indicates that love cannot be measured or foreseen, and the strength of his position as a (rational) scientist is devalued.

Winterson’s male cuckolds may be interpreted as unconvincing stereotypes, as Grice and Woods argue. Conversely they may be understood as challenging the traditional cuckold in literature who usually reinforces the institution of marriage because his lack of masculinity entails that his wife will stray. The implication has been that if a man was more masculine the wife would have remained faithful. Winterson partially borrows from this tradition by parodying the outside male figure, the cuckoo, but she does this by making her husbands’ masculinity an exaggeration instead of diminishing it. When Jove, for example, hears his wife’s tale about the diamond in the base of her spine he asks, “what kind of story is that?” (*GS* 94). He represents the rational, overtly masculine scientist who, like Picasso’s father in *Art and Lies*, favours a traditional approach to truth and consequently favours the lies of realism. Jove’s rhetorical question also returns us to Stevi Jackson’s argument, which claims that masculinity is maintained by avoiding (and disparaging) romanticising in its generic form of story-telling.

Sinclair’s *The Deceived Husband* continues Tony Tanner’s argument in *Adultery in the Novel*, in believing that cuckoldry in literature is ‘safer’ than adultery for the institution of marriage, except Sinclair reasons that even with cuckolds “risky information” is presented, because it proposes that men may fail (52). This

information is made safe by humour and Winterson adheres to this by ridiculing her male cuckolds with their caricatured behaviour. Where Winterson differs, though, is in the use of acerbic humour, which is employed to undermine marriage with the parody of masculinity. The irony of comparing Jove to a prince, for example, is difficult to overlook. This method of diminishing Jove is used by Winterson in preference to having a subtext that preserves masculinity and marriage.

The triangular relationship begins with Jove's scheming, but the power base has no secure foundation. The third point in the triangle, Alice, belongs to neither the earth nor the Gods, similarly to the depiction of Eros in the *Symposium*. She shuttles between her two lovers whilst the triangle is still emotionally intact. She moves between the god and the star, if one remembers the connotations attached to Jove and Stella's names. The "macabre game" that Alice plays when waiting to hear if Stella and Jove have been lost at sea (*GS* 200), wondering which one of her lovers has survived, has her continuing the instability already found in the theme of adultery. Whilst waiting for her lovers to return, Alice asks herself, "which one of them did I love beyond the greedy love that we all share?" (*GS* 200).

The 'greedy love' epitomises an erotic triangle that is based on desire, and not just separation and rivalry. In her review of *Gut Symmetries*, Michèle Roberts posits that this novel could be read as Freudian classic (31). In so far as a triangle is a foundation for the plot and there is a narcissism that unfolds between the female lovers, this is correct. Alice makes comparisons between her relationship with her father and Jove intermittently throughout *Gut Symmetries*: "It had been the same with my father. His interest in me pendulomed from hot intensity to cool indifference" (*GS* 104). The incestuous impulse, which Freud discusses first in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, is inherent in Alice's characterisation with regard to her father. She says, after all, "I

loved my father incestuously. I would have coupled with him in a different morality” (GS 126). In response to Stella asking her if she falls in love often, the reply is, “yes often. With a view, with a book, with a dog, a cat, with numbers, with friends, with complete strangers, with nothing at all” (GS 126). The incestuous love for her father is mentioned as a yearning, because her father never showed her enough love. It is lack, the nature of desire, that is seen to propel Alice into searching for love, and this idea is extended upon in the next novel *The Powerbook*.

Winterson’s triangles do not depend solely on jealousy or Freudian perspectives on the taboo of incest, because they are also employed to explore desire as openness toward an Other. Her triangles do not thrive solely on the competitiveness of jealousy. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in *Between Men*, uses Rene Girard’s rivalry theorem (in his *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*) as a means to further her thesis of male homosocial desire. This type of rivalry is useful to look at for comparative difference to Winterson’s triangle in *Gut Symmetries*. Winterson’s triangle temporarily puts aside rivalry for openness. Sedgwick interprets Girard as seeing the bond that links the rivals as “intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved: that the bonds of “rivalry” and “love”, differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent” (Sedgwick 21). The lover and beloved’s bonds are almost symmetrical to those between the rivals. In Winterson’s novels and in *Gut Symmetries* in particular, the male subject is generally thwarted and this is because the female ‘rivals’ make their bonds overt.

The difference between Girard and Winterson may also be signalled by what Sedgwick reads as Girard’s heavy dependence on the Oedipal triangle, and by his and Freud’s gender blindness to what would happen to the triangle if one of the participants was altered (Sedgwick 23). Sedgwick believes that Freud and Girard treat

the erotic triangle as symmetrical in rivalry and opposition. Her argument stands as far as Girard's remit is concerned, but it is impossible to tell if given a novel such as *Gut Symmetries*, rather than *Madame Bovary* for example, his approach would not alter. Girard's text relies on fiction with one female object of desire, a male lover and cuckolded husband. Winterson, on the other hand, relies on two females and one male for her triangle and continuously re-works who falls in love with whom, even though it may be argued that her triangles have become predictable in favouring love between two women. This same point may be made in a more positive manner: Winterson never depends primarily on heterosexuality as a cornerstone for writing about human relationships.

Gut Symmetries exposes unstable power structures. Because of this it also resists a sympathetic radical feminist analysis, because the text begs to be interpreted away from a simplistic view that only the male and masculinity hold power. The heterosexual impetus of the first triangle, where Jove separates his wife and mistress, is weakened when bisexuality is introduced. Jove's power is diluted as his experiment goes awry. The rivalry between the three may be interpreted as heightened or diminished. Winterson's use of the trope of bisexuality tends to claim that love is beyond gender or sexual restrictions. It questions the taboo insistent in the Oedipal triangle that denotes heterosexuality as the success story of maturation. Within the triangle of Jove, Alice and Stella, bisexuality allows eroticism to 'work' in the plot. Jonathan Dollimore, in *Sex, Literature and Censorship*, posits that if the "reformists" manage to demystify sexuality, "the norm will surely be bisexuality" (17). If this ever were to happen, he claims, "what will seem strangest of all is our current obsessive binary divisions between heterosexual and homosexual: the classification of people according to the sex/gender of their partners, or desired partners" (*Sex* 17). This is

also a viable interpretation of what is inscribed in Winterson's triangular relationships. Sexual divisions are questioned and love is the means for explaining why attraction is possible across imposed binaries. Any readerly concern for Jove is dissipated, however, as he narrates his reasoning for literally eating Stella. Because of his characterisation it becomes increasingly problematic, as the narrative progresses, to understand why Alice and Stella find him at all attractive, and this somewhat weakens the idea that this is a triangle rooted in female bisexuality.

The bisexuality of the novel is deconstructed into lesbianism when Alice declares her 'authentic' desire for Stella. Terry Castle's 'Sylvia Townsend Warner and the Counterplot of Lesbian Fiction' also analyses Sedgwick's theories on triangulated desire. Castle mentions in passing how Jeanette Winterson's work undermines the male-dependent triangle that theories of male homosociality take for granted (146). This 'counterplotting' is observable in *Gut Symmetries* when Stella shows Alice the lover's tarot card. The picture is of a young man trying to choose between two women (GS 200). On the surface this is Jove's early position in the narrative. Stella interprets it as the Eternal triangle, whereas Alice points out that three is a masculine number (GS 200). This suggests that with three, the male, as masculine, has historically reigned as sovereign, but for Winterson the triangle ousts the traditional male perspective in favour of one woman's symmetrical desire for another woman.

Castle's saliency rests in her revealing of how Sedgwick overlooks lesbian desire in the search for, and analysis of, male homosociality in literature. But as Castle points out, Sedgwick's remit of looking at eighteenth and nineteenth-century literature precludes Sedgwick from finding female homosociality or female homosexuality. Twentieth-century literature opens up the possibility of reading these experiences. By exposing the extent of lesbian desire in twentieth-century literature Castle clarifies

how destabilising the triangle of two women and one man can be for the normative practice of heterosexuality:

...by plotting against what Eve Sedgwick has called the 'plot of male homosociality', the archetypal lesbian fiction decanonizes, so to speak, the canonical structure of desire itself. In so far as it documents a world in which men are 'between women' rather than vice versa, it is an insult to the conventional geometries of fictional eros. It dismantles the real, as it were, in a search for the not-yet-real, something unpredicted and unpredictable. It is an assault of the banal: a re-triangulating of triangles. As a consequence it often looks odd, fantastical, implausible, 'not there' - utopian in aspiration if not design. It is, in a word, imaginative. This is why, perhaps, like lesbian desire itself, it is still difficult for us to acknowledge - even when (Queen Victoria notwithstanding) it is so palpably, so plainly, there. (146-147)

Castle's acknowledgement of lesbian desire, and recognition of the triangle where the man is 'between women', has the effect of bolstering the concerns that Winterson displays in her novels. Rather than reading Winterson as simply stereotyping men and masculinity (as Grice and Woods imply), Castle's perspective allows one to appreciate Winterson's literary exploration of triangulated female desire. In each of Winterson's main novels the triangle of two females and one male is invoked. Using Castle's terms, Winterson persistently challenges 'the canonical structure of desire itself' and offers the unpredictable.

Winterson is often castigated for her departure from realism, but bearing Castle's affirmation of the unpredictable in mind, Winterson's novels employ other means such as magic realism and fantasy to re-discover the potential energy of lesbian

desire. Ironically, *Gut Symmetries* marks Winterson's return to a more traditional, recognisable plot structure. It is distinct from the more overtly fantastical aspects contained in *Oranges*, *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*. It has a linearity and clear storyline that is absent from *Written on the Body* and *Art and Lies*. Within the plot of *Gut Symmetries* there is still, nevertheless, the favouring of the unpredictable, of the chance, rogue element that Winterson often includes in her work. Within her oeuvre this may have become expected, but when compared to canonical works she remains the rogue element.

In the dialogue between ME and SHE, Stella admits she has decided who she wants. In the last chapter, 'Judgement', Stella says her decision had been to divorce Jove before he took a bite out of her (GS 215). This discards the triangle on the lover's card, where it appears that it is the man's right to decide. Winterson's reformation of this imbalance consequently disturbs who is the subject with power and who is, or are, the objects of desire. Jove's favourite operatic hero finally gets dragged to hell, and likewise the judgement is against him in this novel.

Jove is not, however, entirely depicted as blameworthy. For instance, when Stella answers Alice's charge that Jove could have killed her, she replies "victim or volunteer?" (GS 216). The erotic triangle that unfolds is made up of victims and volunteers as it becomes impossible to accuse just him of wrongdoing. All three are embroiled in the 'greedy love' that Alice refers to. This awareness of shifts in power is also present in the earlier cited interview with Winterson, where she argues that Alice is not a victim.

Jove, as the man between two women, is developed by Winterson as a modern day Don Juan. Girard's analyses are useful in relation to Jove, beyond the purely triangular, because of the observations he makes of Don Juan. Jove, whose real name

is Giovanni and whose favourite opera is Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, identifies himself with this mythical lover. This corresponds again with Stevi Jackson's argument that masculinity depends on 'the idiom of sexual bravado and conquest, not the language of romance'. Girard explores the underlying weakness of the Don Juan figure: "The real Don Juan is not autonomous; on the contrary, he is incapable of doing without Others" (Girard 51). Girard also states that he (Don Juan) is not apparent today, but can be seen in some of Shakespeare's seducers and Molière's *Don Juan*. The flavour of Winterson's writing suggests that her Jove is not only a throwback from across the centuries, but is also a caricature of contemporary masculinity. An inability to be without others motivates Don Juan and Jove. Their masculinity thrives on attraction and availability, and the security of being loved.

Melanie Klein looks at the Don Juan figure in her examination of infidelity in 'Love, Guilt and Reparation' and explains the persistent need to be unfaithful thus: "By deserting and rejecting some women he unconsciously turns away from his mother, saves her from his dangerous desires and frees himself from his painful dependence on her..." (86). Klein believes that infidelity can express love and hate and in this reference the turning away from a loved one is a form of love, as a search for freedom. In *Gut Symmetries* the infidelities of Alice, Jove and Stella conform to this notion of the search, which also links the text back to the fairy tale of 'The Three Friends' who are left with Death. Don Juan and Jove's continuous negation of commitment overlap and Jove's descent into hellish behaviour metaphorically realises his hero's ending.

Jove is the symbol of male virility because of his nickname and forename. He becomes a cannibal and the love for his wife is turned into self-love. The twin feeling of insularity and yet vulnerability on a ship, which Alice refers to at the beginning of

Gut Symmetries is returned to at the end when Jove begins to eat Stella on their missing boat. The self is represented as forever vulnerable to another, as though the water takes away the apparent solidity of the ground. The boat is lost at sea. When combining this with Jove's supreme act of selfishness there is a highlighting of how there is no such thing as solidity. Subsequently there are no promises that cannot be broken. This is reiterated of course with Winterson's repetition of the theme of adultery.

The underlying theme of incest, and the extent to which this affects Alice and Stella's perspectives on love and their relationship with Jove, must be returned to finally in this chapter as it warrants further exploration in terms of other Winterson novels. *Gut Symmetries* is the direct successor to *Art and Lies* and to the incestuous abuse that Picasso endures. I argue in the previous chapter of this thesis that it is brave of Winterson to place Picasso's abuse alongside Handel's sexual experiences with the Cardinal. Alice's feelings for her father cloud the taboo of incest and child sexuality even further. One interpretation of this is that Alice is being fashioned into a Wintersonian version of Electra. Kristeva's 'About Chinese Women' looks at Electra in an examination of the father/daughter relationship and is additionally useful here for its comparison between Donna Anna of 'Don Giovanni' and Electra:

It takes Mozart to make a comedy out of this fidelity of the daughter to the father. The dead father is retained in the guise of the Commander. Orestes is cut out and replaced with poor Ottavio. Aegisthus and Clytemnestra have no reason to exist: power and *jouissance*, following one upon the other in a radiant musical infinity, will be represented by Don Giovanni. So the heroic Electra becomes the pitiful, unhappy Donna Anna. ('About' 152)

Alice, Stella and Donna Anna are proverbially ‘daddy’s little girls’. Their mothers are the rivals in their love for their fathers.

Electra’s heroism is, as Kristeva argues, diluted by Donna Anna. This heroism is watered down even further in the shape of Alice and Stella as they delude themselves, and are deluded by, the promises of romantic love. Jove’s *jouissance*, when compared to Don Giovanni’s, is negligible, as he becomes a representative of risible masculinity. These twentieth century points in the triangle are accordingly following the pattern of their predecessors, but are formed by the discourse of romantic love and a feminism that understands the weakness implicit in the construct of masculinity respectively.

The temporary symmetry offered in the mirror geography that Alice and Stella represent is the position where Alice feels authentic desire. This temporary symmetry avoids the rivalry of Oedipus where jealousy and negativity thrive, but this is short-lived inside the triangle of the three main protagonists’ relationship. When the three meet together once a month Alice feels like an outsider: “If I was tongue-tied, Jove and Stella were the ropes (*GS* 130). Alice considers that at these meetings she is almost back at school, and the repetition of the same words being said every month is far from imposing an ideal relationship in the form of a triangle, which perhaps circles us back to Freud’s rivalry theorem. *Gut Symmetries* uses the triangle to posit the possibility of productiveness rather than straightforward binary disparities but there is also rivalry present. The drawbacks to the triangle are not ignored and this tends to dispel a Utopian reading of the novel as the triangle is always depicted as an unstable, risky relationship.

In conclusion, *Gut Symmetries* centres on portraying the effect of the ‘rogue element’ on the sanctity of marriage. Its connection to the next and earlier novels is

the theme of adultery, in particular in the recurrence of the triangle of one male and two female lovers. This formation of triangulated desire has the effect of destabilising the normative practice of assuming that one female is necessarily, and naturally, the object of desire for two males. By geometrically re-ordering the triangle along the lines of lesbian desire, rather than a male orientated heterosexual triangle, Winterson re-interprets the possibilities of love. The overall impact of Winterson's triangulated desire is that it forces one to consider the possibility of love outside the master/slave binary relationship. This escape is represented in the mirror geography between Alice and Stella.

The difficulty implicit in Winterson's continuing thematic return to the triangle of two females and one male is that within her own work this has become an expected feature. Once more the love between two women surpasses a heterosexual relationship, and again love is worshipped as transcendent in that it is worth searching for despite the upset this will cause. These have become expected, even predictable features, and Winterson should be praised for creating a collection of novels that are alternatives to the dominant heterosexual romantic discourses. There is, nevertheless, a danger that Winterson has become too restricted in her choice of material. From *Oranges* to *Art and Lies* there are attempts at innovation within Winterson's now familiar rubric of lesbian and bisexual desire - in comparison, *Gut Symmetries* and *The Powerbook* are over-familiar as they re-visit the same territory and find the same conclusions.

Chapter Seven

Love Stories: New and Old

The Powerbook

In May 2001 Winterson claimed that *The Powerbook* was the final novel in a cycle of her work over the last fifteen years.¹ Winterson did not clarify what constitutes this cycle or that this latest text belongs to it. This thesis maintains that her seven main novels have a thread that runs through them that asserts how love generally brings complications and grief. At the same time this thread insists that love is desirable. Because of this the pain associated with loving another is held in tension with its desirability. Winterson's narrators are, however, in love with being in love and the attractiveness of love outweighs the urge to avoid it. It may also be argued that the pain associated with loving is what makes it desirable when loving is understood as being based on the master/slave binary, which *The Powerbook* makes overt allusions to. *The Powerbook* continues the look at human relationships that has been present in Winterson's earlier works and becomes the last, conclusive chapter in the cycle by virtue of its self-conscious inclusion of old and new ways to tell love stories. It reiterates the power of love and argues once more that it is inescapable.

The structure of *The Powerbook* rests on exposing the tension of opposites. Above this tension, there is the recurrent presumption that love is transcendent. *The Powerbook* maintains *Gut Symmetries*' interest in realities, rather than reality, and also explores what has previously been proclaimed in Winterson's earlier novels, that

¹ Winterson spoke about this at the Leeds branch of Waterstone's (in May 2001), at a publicity drive for the paperback release of *The Powerbook*. This point has been confirmed by Winterson's secretary, by email.

is, that Wintersonian love is beyond deconstruction. She consistently idealises this emotion in her writing but it is in this latest novel that love is most central thematically. This love is both romantic and familial. The narrator, Ali/Alix, sets out to prove how the search for love is worth it, similarly to other narrators of Winterson's work. The narrator relies on telling new and old love stories to exemplify once more the need for the search. The idealisation of love is, I argue, made specifically apparent in this novel by virtue of the tension of opposites that the narrator refers to. Love is described as ultimately transcending these opposites, just as it transcends differences of sexuality in Winterson's work generally, death in *Written on the Body* and textuality in *Art and Lies*. Admittedly love exists in, and creates tensions between, the narrator and her lover Tulip but the abstract concept of love is described as surpassing the tensions of opposites.

The Powerbook begins with the promise of freedom "for just one night" as the narrator Ali/Alix offers to realise such a request from an email from her lover Tulip (TP 3). With the framework of cyberspace Winterson has the ideal medium to explore her recurrent concern with the liberation from assigned masculine and feminine roles. Love is re-employed in *The Powerbook* to challenge the act of stereotyping gender roles once again but this novel also uses love to supersede the freedom that cyberspace can offer as the narrative becomes increasingly focused on love's place in literature. Love assists in the deconstruction of binaries, whilst paradoxically assuming the transcendent position once more. The first part of this chapter examines the tension of opposites that is inherent in *The Powerbook*. The second section analyses the love stories that are re-told by the narrator in order to highlight the way love in this latest work is revered as an object of desire.

The Tensions of Opposites

The Powerbook is conscious of its own status as another text in Winterson's oeuvre, because of its reliance on love to power its narrative. It also has a new method of telling a love story because the narrative's construction depends formally on computer jargon. This is evident in some of the chapter titles, such as 'Search', 'New Document' and 'Open Hard Drive'. *The Powerbook* is divided between the new and the old. Its form relies heavily on modern, technological words and phrases but its content strictly adheres to the improbability of ever escaping the influence of the past. This past may be understood as not only an old love affair but also earlier literatures that have also focused on love.

Adding together the limiting 'just for one night' promise of freedom and the later exploration of how love intrudes on the virtual, *The Powerbook* becomes a novel that interrogates Utopian dreams on the surface at least. There is a refusal to change identity permanently and love is only mentioned where there is accompanying pain. The narrative superficially appears to refuse the sanctity of the happy ending, but once more love and the dream of unification are at the heart of this novel as well.

Ali/Alix proposes to reinvent 'you' (Tulip) virtually: "This is where the story starts. Here, in these long lines of laptop DNA. Here we take your chromosomes, twenty-three pairs, and alter your height, eyes, teeth, sex. This is an invented world. You can be free just for one night" (TP 4). This pledge to remove biological restrictions, down to the building blocks of DNA, is immense and as Ali/Alix describes it, it is going "deeper than disguise" (TP 4). 'Language Costumier' is the first chapter's title and is also a description of the narrator as she offers to rewrite Tulip. Ali/Alix compares her work to being a shopkeeper in a fancy-dress shop, where customers could change outfits to alter themselves. This up-to-date costumier burrows

deeper than the surface of clothes and the implication of cross-dressing to transform Tulip with words, and with the assistance of technology. The euphoria associated with the liberty of having a completely new self is guarded by the one night proviso, because the freedom offered is only ever a limited one. This proviso is also applied when the narrator appears to form a relationship with Tulip and discovers that ‘meatspace’ (which is Winterson’s term for material reality) intrudes on cyberspace: “The trouble is that in imagination anything can be perfect. Downloaded into real life, it was messy” (*TP* 46). *The Powerbook* is signalling the difference between art and life, which is another recurring feature in Winterson’s work. The artist, Ali/Alix, has the power to reinvent, but this is limited because ‘real life’ will intrude and spoil the perfection of her imaginative creation, which is Tulip in this instance.

The paradoxical limitations of freedom, which *The Powerbook* and *The Passion* investigate, have been tested, coincidentally, by Winterson in court. In a curious instance of life mirroring art the internet became caught up in its own lack of regulations when Winterson took exception to Simon Hogarth planning to buy her identity. Mark Lawson agrees with Winterson’s right to take Hogarth to court in ‘Opinion’ in *The Guardian*: “Ever wanted to be someone else? Simon Howarth (sic) wished to be 130 authors” (24). Hogarth planned to register these electronic identities in the hope that he would then be able to sell them back to the appropriate writers, one of whom was Jeanette Winterson. Lawson continues: “A name is a basic human right: a point made by prisoners who refuse to answer to numbers. Jeanette Winterson should be cheered to the door of the court”, and asks: “Why should people lose their right to name and reputation when they step through a computer portal?” (24). The freedom from having a fixed identity is ironically taken to its extreme by Hogarth as he planned to take control of other people’s names. The problems associated with

interpreting freedom as relative is made apparent in this court case and is also an observable feature of *The Powerbook*.

There is a repeated line in this novel that echoes the reluctance to offer an idyllic vision of unlimited freedom, which is, that “there is no love that does not pierce the hands and feet” (*TP* 79, 128, 188). The allusions to Christ’s suffering are apparent and it is as though this love, this Western passion that *The Passion* broaches, exemplifies how for Winterson the notion of true love can only ever be one that encompasses the hardship of a martyr’s life. A concentrated reading of *The Powerbook* depends on the over-arching metaphor of Capri’s funicular railway. This ties in with the Christian overtones because the message from this metaphor of the railway is consistent with love piercing the hands and feet. It reiterates the allusions to crucifixion and figuratively describes a dialectical perspective:

The funicular railway, completed in 1906, connects the harbour to the main square, and its sheer, vertiginous ascent is a kind of Tiberio-strategy in miniature. If the tension between the upward car and the downward car were to relax, both cars would crash through the red pantile roofs of the side-by-side houses and, collecting olive trees and grapevines as a memorial, the train and its passengers would career into the sea, nose first, broken backed to join the other wrecks never recovered. (*TP* 89)

Capri’s “secret of success” has also been founded on maintaining tensions, such as innocence and knowing, land and sea and poverty and riches (*TP* 91). This metaphor of Capri and its railway extends across the novel as pleasure is balanced by drawbacks and pain, and cyberspace is in conflict with meatspace. Ali/Alix uses this ‘secret of success’ of contrasting opposites to explain by comparison her understanding of love: “I like being on my own better than I like anything else, but I can’t give up love.

Maybe it's the tension between longing and aloneness that I need. My own funicular railway, holding in balance the two things most likely to destroy me" (TP 134). This is then a key quotation from *The Powerbook*. By referring to love in relation to the tension of opposites, love is outlined as transcendent. Ali/Alix cannot give up love and needs the tension of opposites as a balance.

Ali/Alix is also thinking of love as inevitable, which resembles *The Passion's* insistence on pre-destination. The materiality of assuming such inevitability means that *The Powerbook* is another Winterson novel that implies that love is all-consuming and that it will be unavoidably succumbed to eventually. The tensions that structure the text are now shown to be irrelevant. This fatalistic attitude undoubtedly complies with an assumption that 'we' are pre-destined and pre-programmed to fall in love, as though this is natural. There is also the implication that the universal 'we' consequently expose ourselves to pain as a negative aspect of being romantically involved. Love for the narrator staves off self-destruction whilst also inviting it. This strong hint at pre-destination is conservative and is dangerous in suggesting that suffering is somehow natural. This brings us back to the Christian overtones of passion, which Winterson relies upon aesthetically to elevate the power of love in her novels. The reader appears to be expected to admire the 'beauty' of this passion, as with the piercing of the hands and feet motif. If the readers are being asked to admire this, it becomes evident that Winterson is preaching a message when writing about love.

Ali/Alix's longing and aloneness balance each other and this is apt when considering that the name Ali is read as a co-ordinate by Tulip when she asks if Ali is male or female whilst they communicate via the computer screen:

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.’ (TP 26)

The conversation continues as Ali/Alix and Tulip become entangled and Ali/Alix convinces her that it is “too late” for them to stop communicating (TP 28). It is too late because the story has started and because of this they are joined together: “We’ve started. We’re here” (TP 28), and the “here” they create together is Paris. As this chapter fades into the next one Paris becomes a reality. The border between the imagined and the real is crossed as the lovers form a relationship. Love, it is implied, has the potential to blur the boundaries and the trope of cyberspace allows this confusion to take place.

Elaine Showalter’s review of *The Powerbook*, entitled ‘Eternal Triangles’, interprets this novel’s concerns as more than the promise that present and future technology can offer identities:

Designed to suggest the appearance and the technique of virtual reality, with a cover like a computer handbook and chapter divisions of hard drives, icons and documents, *The Powerbook* is not a playful postmodern experiment or an investigation of the multiple personalities of email. Instead Winterson uses the metaphor of email to discuss sexual freedom and power. (9)

I agree with Showalter up to the point where she claims that Winterson uses email to discuss sexual freedom, but it is difficult to condone the rather absolutist view that this “is not a playful postmodern experiment or an investigation of the multiple personalities of email”. I prefer to argue instead that Winterson is at times performing a similar manoeuvre to one used in *Written on the Body* (where the narrator’s sex is undefined), as she holds up two seemingly contradictory ideas at once to demonstrate how delusory the oppositions actually are. Winterson subsequently reveals that they are not necessarily oppositional. Love may be the cause for these tensions, but it also remains isolated from these tensions of opposites, such as gender polarities, the virtual and the real, and new and old, as it stands separated from the practice of deconstruction.

Because *The Powerbook* deconstructs opposites such as the virtual and the real, the reader is placed in the position of feeling as though s/he has to decide which one in the binary is the most valid. This practice forces one to recognise that it does not matter which one in the pair is chosen, because deconstruction undermines hierarchical thinking. For example, it is impossible to decide for certain if the narrator and Tulip are actually in Paris, or if this is still a part of the fantasy between the two as they communicate at a distance in the previous chapter. The playful postmodern experiments of *Written on the Body* and *The Powerbook* interrogate the fallacy of the need to decide between false dichotomies. This is extended in this later novel when Ali/Alix leaves the reader two possible endings to her love affair with Tulip: does the lover stay or go?² This blurring of oppositions is not continuous in the novel,

² This part of the story, where the reader is asked to decide whether the lovers remain together or not, is made more significant in the play adaptation. In the play, this is the final scene.

however, because the motif of the funicular railway and the tension this exposes tends to override this. Deconstruction is limited along with freedom.

Love is at the centre of the novel and is increasingly separated from the blurring of opposites and tensions as the narrative continues. Showalter's review of *The Powerbook* disputes this understanding that love is the mainspring of the narrative:

No critic has the right to tell a novelist what or how to write, and my disappointment in *The Powerbook* is not about its style or choice of subject, but about its repetitiveness and reductiveness. In Winterson's invented cities, no emotional coins are larger than fifty pence, although she is dealing with the higher mathematics of relationships. (9)

Judging by these statements it appears that Showalter believes that Winterson has not engaged sufficiently with the relationship between Ali/Alix and Tulip, although this is not specified. The effect of using a computer screen to construct their meeting and consequent attachment is that it avoids 'real' life and may appear detached from emotional warmth. It is possible that at the time of writing emails do not hold the same resonance as the love letter and that Winterson is premature in her use of a screen as a rendezvous to make this love story convincing. The computer screen admittedly lacks the traditionally romantic allure of Paris.

This lack of tradition is accounted for in the novel as it switches from cyber to meatspace. As the novel progresses the computer becomes an increasingly inadequate medium for the narrator to maintain a relationship. It exists largely as a meeting place for minds and within the narrative it reflects the stilted exchanges that arise from two people just beginning to communicate. Where Showalter perceives little engagement with emotions, it may be argued that Winterson is reflecting the inadequacy of the

medium she is using. This interpretation is strengthened as the narrative moves from focusing on cyberspace to old love stories.

The later recourse in the novel to ‘great and ruinous lovers’ tends to exemplify how love as a theme in the novel is not ephemeral or superficial as Showalter suggests, but is a constant in Winterson’s literature and literature across the centuries. Underneath the pose of deconstructing the virtual and real opposition, the ascendancy of ‘true’ love is still in place. When Showalter perceives superficiality she is discounting how Winterson is praising past descriptions of love.

Phil Baker’s review of *The Powerbook* refuses to acknowledge the complexity of tensions that both hold the novel together and keep the lovers apart:

With gimmicky dotcom enterprises collapsing daily, *The Powerbook* by “Jeanette.Winterson” strikes an unpromising note from the start. Winterson’s own stock has fallen badly over the past few years, to the point where a hostile critic can say that “Jeanette” and “Winterson” are the two funniest words in the English language. That is persecution rather than criticism, but it is still possible to approach her writing without malicious glee and find it unimpressive. (43)

Rather than complying with Baker’s own ‘gimmicky’ method of criticism, it is more constructive to analyse the text rather than attempting an assassination of the author. Farwell’s *Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Narratives* also accuses Winterson of using gimmicks in relation to *Written on the Body*’s gender-unspecified narrator. Both Baker and Farwell use this word as a pejorative term for experimentation. If *The Powerbook* was just another dotcom enterprise Baker’s gimmick accusation would be justifiable, but, this is only a partial, partisan reading. The format depends on new technology, and it may be seen to date in time, but it is also self-consciously a

novel of the new millennium, which potentially allows it to be a ready-made historical document. It also draws on its past. This past is recognisably other literatures and other novels by Winterson and because of these points *The Powerbook* is more complex than Baker or Showalter allow for.

An obvious example of how *The Powerbook* draws on its own past, in terms of Winterson's oeuvre, may be found in *Written on the Body*'s allusions to virtual reality. Lisa Moore's article, 'Teledildonics: Virtual Lesbians in the Fiction of Jeanette Winterson', analyses Winterson's interest in the virtual in *Written on the Body*, and aligns virtual reality with the 'unknowable' narrator: "The narrator's undeclared gender makes the space of narration a 'virtual' space, a technical construction that can be manipulated to accommodate (and frustrate) a variety of libidinal investments on the part of readers" (Moore 108). Apart from Moore's interpretation of the narrator there is also a specific section of *Written on the Body* that discusses virtual reality. Whilst the viability of a fragmented subject is being exploited, the narrator also cautions against technological advances overwhelming the Other.

When comparing *Written on the Body* to *The Powerbook*, it is apparent that they cope differently with the power of technology. *Written on the Body* is, for instance, less optimistic: "Why leave yourself to chance when you could leave yourself to science? Shortly the pseudo-lab coat approach of dating by details will make way for a genuine experiment whose results, however unusual, will remain controllable. Or so they say" (*W* 96). *Written on the Body* also ironically broaches the concept of simulated sex: "And sex? Certainly. Teledildonics is the word. You will be able to plug in your telepresence to the billion-bundle network of fibre optics criss-crossing the world and join your partner in Virtuality" (*W* 97).

Howard Rheingold's *Virtual Reality* also uses the term 'teledildonics' and defines it as "simulated sex at a distance" (19). Rheingold is as scathing of such an invention as *Written on the Body*. He is concerned with the unlikelihood of this happening in the near future and with the voyeuristic excitement of journalists when mentioning the idea, whereas *Written on the Body* depicts it as a denaturalisation of human contact. Teledildonics denigrates sexual love. The following quotation is the epigraph from chapter sixteen of *Virtual Reality* and it frames Rheingold's and *Written on the Body*'s views on sex at a distance:

There was a young man named Kleene,
 Who invented a fucking machine.
 Concave or convex, it fit either sex,
 And was exceedingly easy to clean. (345)

Theodor Nelson, according to Rheingold, coined the word 'dildonics' in 1974 and it is re-used by Rheingold and Winterson to explore the possible future of sex. In *Written on the Body* the narrator is indifferent to technological advances and when understood in context this is a critique of Elgin's interests, because he prefers the computer screen to 'real' life. The narrator discusses his/her love affair with Louise using Elgin's discourse in opposition to him: "We were in a Virtual world where the only taboo was real life. But in a true Virtual world I could have gently picked up Elgin and dropped him from the frame" (*W* 98).

The thread of interest in the virtual is maintained more positively in *The Powerbook*, yet it still clings to the materiality of how 'real' life intrudes. In this latest novel 'virtuality' has a more liberatory role, but it is still a provisional one. In *The Powerbook*'s early pages possibilities to love are widened as the computer becomes a means to communicate, rather than a means to replace relationships as is

suggested in *Written on the Body*. It is only as *The Powerbook* progresses that it becomes clearer that it is human bonding that is ultimately desired by the narrator and Tulip. But when the computer screen is understood as a metaphor for the mind, and the imagination, it once again becomes the ideal cipher for communication.

The Powerbook appears to embrace cyberspace less conservatively than *Written on the Body* as it explains the potential freedom of using language without the hindrance of identity. This is exemplified when the narrator asserts her power as a writer: "I can change the story. I am the story" (TP 5). As she 'logs on' at night intermittently throughout the novel it is made apparent that the power to change the story is only available when there is a reader willing to reciprocate her message and to connect. Sometimes she 'logs on' and there is only the blank screen. Even though cyberspace offers limitless opportunities for re-configuring gender and identity, the narrator still needs human contact. This is made firmer in the novel's sex scenes, because new technologies never quite usurp a touch of humanity: "You kiss me and the glass grows cloudy. I stop thinking. Meatspace still has some advantages for a carbon-based girl" (TP 174). Teledildonics ultimately has no place in this novel's world(s) either.

Conversely, in opposition to this apparent preference for meatspace, the penultimate chapter of *The Powerbook* suddenly switches from idealising sexual love to looking at the shortfall of the material world as opposed to the screen: "There's no Netscape Navigator to help me find my way around life. I have to do it myself and my helpers are unexpected and odd" (TP 227). It is evident that *The Powerbook* deconstructs its allegiance to cyberspace and never quite settles. This act of deconstruction may also be described as wariness. *The Powerbook* never promotes liberation through technology too whole-heartedly. This is apparent in the telling of old love stories, as well as new ones, and in the 'just for one night' promise.

Certain aspects of *The Powerbook* dismiss the influence of postmodernism and poststructuralism entirely, and instead prefer a perspective more aligned with Enlightenment thinking. The first story that Ali/Alix creates for Tulip is about Ali the tulip smuggler, which hints at a belief that the mind is superior to the body in this particular hierarchy. The following exemplifies this analysis, as the captain of the ship that Ali is travelling on philosophises to her:

You will live in this world as though it is real, until it is no longer real, and then you will know, as I do, that all your adventures and all your possessions, and all your losses, and what you have loved – this gold, this bread, the green glass sea – were things you dreamed as surely as you dreamed of buffalo and watercress. (*TP* 14)

Kate Kellaway's review of *The Powerbook* in *The Observer* also cites this passage, and does so to call the captain, "a master of virtual reality before its time" (11). If this is so, this novel is symbolically demanding that it is not just new technology that has the copyright on making fictions, this has been happening for centuries.

When the captain also says to Ali, "only the body sleeps and wakes. The mind moves through itself" (*TP* 15), the old Cartesian dualism is being asserted. Winterson may be understood at this juncture as using cyberspace to reaffirm, rather than deconstruct, the duality of mind and body. Showalter is also incidentally proved correct in that this is not a postmodern experiment. *The Powerbook* clings to the philosophy of the Enlightenment when reading the captain's observations. The captain is historically speaking for the period he is created in, but late twentieth century Ali/Alix also shares his view: "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" (*TP* 53).

At this juncture in the narrative Winterson once again echoes Lewis Carroll's *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*, specifically the Red Knight's conversation with Alice in the chapter 'It's My Own Invention': "'What does it matter where my body happens to be?'" he said. "My mind goes on working all the same'" (Carroll 213). In *Oranges* Jeanette's dismay at her mother's betrayal is made clearer by Jeanette's bemoaning that mother is, "not the White Queen any more" (*O* 110). Additionally, Alice the 'rogue element' in *Gut Symmetries* is another allusion to Carroll's text. Her name immediately suggests the connection and this is supported in the reality-shifting world that she inhabits. By referring to *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*, *The Powerbook* is accentuating how the imagination and the mind can invert reality. Winterson's repeated use of Carroll's text is also another means for holding her work together in a cycle.

Winterson's reliance on duality to tell a story also draws one inevitably to comparisons with romanticism. Using Anne Mellor's terms the narrator is a "masculine" romantic:

As the obsession of the male Romantic poets with the principle of polarity might indicate – think of Blake's *Contraries*, Coleridge's enduring concern with the relation of the subject to the object, Shelley's opposition of analytical reason to synthetic imagination – a binary model is already deeply implicated in "masculine" Romanticism (it receives its ultimate philosophical statement in Hegel's dialectic). (3)

The polarity that *The Powerbook* is so heavily dependent on is observable in Mellor's model and in the binaries that *Oranges* exposes but does not 'explode'. Ali/Alix's own funicular railway and the choice of stories she tells resist the postmodern love

affair with overstepping boundaries. These stories instead revert to a world where true love exists in fiction and dualism.

Aidan Day's *Romanticism* argues against a simplified categorisation of the Enlightenment and Romanticism and points out that there is fluidity between the movements. This is particularly useful when analysing *The Powerbook* as this novel displays the ability to shift in style and time. Day's definition recognises that the Enlightenment should not be viewed as simply negative, which is noteworthy when considering how poststructuralist theorists often attack it: "Rather than insisting on the sole importance of reason it is truer to the nature of the Enlightenment in all its variety to characterize it more generally in terms of its questioning of traditional authorities, models and institutions" (Day 71). Day's insistence on emphasising the Enlightenment's legacy of reasoning and feeling, as well as his exposition of the fluidity between the Enlightenment and Romanticism, places *The Powerbook* within the two categories. Day's reasoning rests on seeing the influence of the past on the present and consequently his argument may be stretched to this novel in that it too defies literary taxonomy. *The Powerbook* realises that the present has not occurred in a vacuum, but is influenced by its predecessors. It exhibits postmodern influences in its form, but because it does not deconstruct love its adherence to binary thinking, which Mellor notes is intrinsic to Romanticism, and is elemental to the Enlightenment project, demonstrates an attachment to the past that refuses to be severed.

In *The Powerbook* two minds connect across space and time. The computer is the vehicle for the two lovers to meet. It is a means of access. The mind and body are as separate as ever and the mind takes precedence for the most part, especially as the word 'meatspace' lends itself to being lesser in the hierarchy. In *Desire* Belsey analyses the Enlightenment's association with the separation and hierarchization of

mind over body. She also examines its legacy in the guise of the promise of 'true love' in romantic fiction:

True love does not quite keep its promise to unify mind and body. The commonest impediment to happiness in romance is uncertainty about whether the protagonists are really in love or simply subject to an overwhelming erotic imperative, whether, in other words, the whole person is involved. (28)

Desire is a poststructuralist account of desire and consequently it undermines the binary opposition of mind and body and the false promise that true love offers. The promise is false for Belsey because the separation and proposed union rest on a lie: "True love, then, is not so much a union of mind and body, as an alternation of their dominance" (30). *The Powerbook* recognises the separation but never deliberately expresses that the impossible project that is true love is why Winterson's version of love (which is true love) will never be pain free. It skirts the issue as the meeting of minds over cyberspace is separated from sex in Paris, Capri and London. The bodies are in meatspace whereas the minds are free of material constraints. Belsey exposes the impossibility of unity, and *The Powerbook* appears to agree with this, except in the latter unity is still worth searching for. The novel never challenges the received ideas from the past, which thrive on separation and the piercing of hands and feet. This is not criticism but a statement. Winterson does not have to be an author who deconstructs love and, similarly to Showalter, I would not like to presume to tell a writer what or how to write. In *The Powerbook* the rationality of the mind never quite coordinates with the urge of the body and because of this it becomes a romantic fiction when using Belsey's terms, as it promises and fails to unify just like true love.

However, *The Powerbook's* conscious rather than naïve acceptance of both the split and of romance's impossible project of unification suggests that Winterson has not become Barbara Cartland. This consciousness implies instead that the novel accepts duality as impossible to negotiate, which politically may be understood as conservative. Its conservatism still yearns for the promise of unity that prefigures romantic love. It also echoes words from its direct predecessor *Gut Symmetries*: "It used to be that the real and the invented were parallel lines that never met. Then we discovered that space is curved, and in curved space parallel lines always meet" (*TP* 94).³

The impossible promise of true love rests on the unlikelihood of the illusion matching up with the real and that is why with idealised love there will always be obstacles to surmount. Disappointment is intrinsic in Winterson's novels, as the lovers, such as Ali/Alix, Henri, and Jordan, create their beloved according to their own desires. Stevi Jackson's 'Women and Heterosexual Love' is quoted in chapter three of this thesis, where the "other we pursue so compulsively is frequently our own creation" (53), and this point is also relevant to *The Powerbook*. This connection between fiction and love is also a useful area to consider across this thesis as it explains why disappointment is intrinsic to love. This is because unity is impossible to achieve. The excitement of the chase across Europe and cyberspace and the impossible hope of the illusion becoming fact are elemental to telling a successful, unhappy love story. This is particularly so when using de Rougemont's rubric, where 'happy love has no history'.

The notions of being in control and of having an essential self are inseparable from

³ This quotation is comparable to the following reference from *Gut Symmetries*: "In curved space the angles over-add themselves and parallel lines always meet" (*GS* 17).

the aspirations of romantic love and this illusion of power is encoded in *The Powerbook*. Language is a tool for Ali/Alix rather than constitutive as earlier novels such as *Written on the Body* and *Art and Lies* tend to assume. Ali/Alix, who is a writer, believes that language can be mastered: “The alphabet of my DNA shapes certain words, but the story is not told. I have to tell it myself” (TP 4). The flirtation with freedom is curtailed by the mind and by the false belief that there is somebody present who will ultimately control the words, as Ali/Alix claims: “I can change the story. I am the story. Begin” (TP 5). Her sense of power is another illusion in that she believes that she can master words and love. Her inability to master neither of these suggests that *The Powerbook* is still influenced by postmodern and poststructuralist uncertainties.

Love Stories

The love stories told by the narrator reflect a desire for reciprocated love as Ali/Alix appears to be seduced by romantic love. The stories also paradoxically, but necessarily, dwell on the obstacles that romantic love requires. A further theoretical paradox of *The Powerbook* emerges in its understanding of language’s power to construct emotions, such as love, and in its simultaneous alliance to hinting that love is beyond description by language. The literary great and ruinous lovers are the vehicles that Ali/Alix uses to talk about “love’s script” and of how it has “no end of beginnings” (TP 77):

The stories we sit up late to hear are love stories. It seems that we cannot know enough about this riddle of our lives. We go back and back to the same scenes, the same words, trying to scrape out the meaning. Nothing

could be more familiar than love. Nothing else eludes us so completely.

(TP 78)

De Rougemont in *Love in the Western World* constructs a similar argument: “Why is it that we delight most of all in some tale of impossible love? Because we long for the *branding*; because we long to grow *aware* of what is on fire inside us” (51). This is de Rougemont’s explanation as to why the Tristan and Iseult myth has been so enduringly popular. This couple re-appear in the list of great and ruinous lovers, which also includes Lancelot and Guinevere, and are touchstones for explaining the pain associated with loving when there are obstacles in the way, which is indicative of romantic love.

In the short chapter ‘Great and Ruinous Lovers’ there is an extraordinary statement that attempts to explain why these stories are retold so often: “The love we seek overrules human nature” (78). Desire is being described as beyond the essential, and, it is implied, far beyond explanation by fiction. Love in this novel is removing itself from *Oranges*, where the understanding that love is a construction^{is} represented by the artificial thread. For *The Powerbook* (love) stories are useful in that they help one to get closer to a definition of what love is but even then the riddle has not been solved: “Love is worth death. Love is worth life. My search for you, your search for me, goes beyond life and death into one long call into the wilderness” (TP 79).⁴ Love is not just transcendent in these extracts, it has become essentialised

As well as offering an essentialised account of love, it is also written of as a fiction as Ali/Alix enters into the game of telling the stories ‘we’ long to hear. Ali the smuggler is kidnapped by pirates and is taken to the princess to teach her the art of

⁴ This quotation from *The Powerbook* is reminiscent of a reference from Barthes’ *A Lover’s Discourse* that has previously been quoted in chapter four of this thesis in relation to *Written on the Body*. This is where Barthes discusses the lover’s doomed wandering.

loving. The moral of this story is that gender is a simulacrum, like reality, and that sex is made possible by a tulip coming to life. Sexual love is, it is implied, developed in the imagination and attraction is psychological rather than biological. Teledildonics is displaced by the creativity of thought and a tulip, and the chance to love is widened.

The other stories the narrator tells are of her own exploits, in Capri for example, and of earlier literary lovers. Winterson draws not only on Lancelot and Guinevere and Tristan and Iseult, but also on Paolo and Francesca, Giovanni, and *Orlando Furioso*. In so doing the computer screen gradually makes way for the past. These old, even timeless, love stories hold the future of technology in tension. *The Powerbook* almost over-relies on these other discourses and a negative criticism of the novel is that they tend to quieten Winterson's own voice and story-telling technique. When these old love stories are read in tension with the book's format, however, these past and ruinous lovers balance the urge to see the future as progressive. The novel is reifying its obligations to past love stories. Their inclusion is an acceptance of Winterson's influences. They illuminate how a piece of writing does not occur in a vacuum and that her work does not claim to be the origin of love in literature. The inclusion also suggests that love is textual, as well as hinting that it is eternal, innate and universally recognisable. Because of this it may be argued that *The Powerbook* does, after all, use the thread motif that is vital to *Oranges*. Love has become a discursive thread from the past.

Winterson's lovers' discourse extends to using true stories as well as notable figures in literature. The textual fact of Mallory's love is used through the words that his wife wrote to him. The dramatic reconstruction of his last movements and the reading of his letter from his wife shape him into a romantic heroic figure that has followed his dream as he is believed to be the first to have ascended Everest. In terms

of Platonic love his ascension symbolises the striving for the greater beauty and for love. A letter was actually found in his pocket and the novel exploits this recorded word for evidence of the existence of love: “Unfold it. Read it. She loves him. She wants him to come home. His children miss him. The garden is lovely” (*TP* 152). The letter has been frozen in time along with Mallory and this old love story manages to persist into the present. It persuades the reader to face the connection between love and loss, and the inevitable poignancy that is attached to a loved one dying. The letter also emphasises the narrator’s desire to preserve words of love. It symbolises the love between husband and wife and is a manifestation of authenticated romantic love, which Ali/Alix is in love with.

Mallory’s connection to Lancelot, whose story is also re-told, is that he is another heroic figure.⁵ Both men (heroically) follow their desires. In the stage version of *The Powerbook*, which is devised by Winterson, Lancelot makes his entrance by descending a ladder into a large glass box that contains Guinevere. The use of the ladder associatively invokes Plato’s *Symposium* again, but the act of descending rather than ascending suggests a re-worked understanding of Socrates’ explanation of love. Winterson’s love, in both the novel and the dramatised version of *The Powerbook*, fuses the search for love into ascent and descent. The search is the pivotal action, for Mallory and Lancelot, rather than the hierarchical thinking that is implicit in the movement upwards.

The appreciation of the higher love is still present in *The Powerbook* and this arises in the references to Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*. Ali/Alix draws parallels between herself and Lancelot with the motif of searching and her longing for love, with Dante’s visit to Paradise. Her value of love is equated with the final lines of

⁵ Mallory and Lancelot are also connected because Malory is another author of Lancelot’s story.

Paradise: “what Dante calls ‘the love that moves the sun and the other stars’” (*TP* 187). Ali/Alix continues: “This love exists. Perhaps it is the only thing that exists. It is the buried treasure. The treasure is really there. Fragments hints, clues, letters, persuade me on. I’ve come near to it sometimes, but like Lancelot outside the Chapel of the Grail, I haven’t been able to go in. I may never be able to go in” (*TP* 187). The inference is that, like Lancelot, she may not be worthy of this love, which insists yet again how superior it is.

The extract from Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso* that is included in *The Powerbook* is another elaboration on the theme of heroic, even futile, searching for what is desired. Orlando is in Atlante’s castle in *The Powerbook* and this is where the ‘visitors’ to the castle are free to go, except that they are ensnared by what they have come in search for:

And I will tell you a strange thing: whenever one of us turned to leave, wearied and desperate, for the doors were always open and no one was prisoner here – that man would see, for a moment, a vision of what he sought – his lady, his falcon, his horse, the band of robbers who had fired his house. He would hear a voice, begging him, imploring him, taunting him, so that at the second when he would have abandoned his maze, he returned again, excited, convinced, to search the fishpond, the loggia, the scullery, the closet, the...(*TP* 240)

Italo Calvino’s *Why Read the Classics?* interprets Atlante’s magic castle as one of the centres of gravity of this epic. The others are how Orlando went “furiously mad” (63), and the constantly deferred love of Ruggiero for Bradamante (64). Calvino describes Orlando and the other knights as wandering aimlessly through the castle’s halls looking for their objects of desire: “In other words, the palace is devoid of what they

seek, and is populated only by those in pursuit” (65). Calvino continues: “Desire is a race towards the void, Atlante’s spell concentrates all unsatisfied desires within the enclosure of the labyrinth, but does not alter the rules that govern men’s movements in the open spaces of the poem and the world” (65). It is understandable, then, that Winterson includes this section from *Orlando Furioso* because of the theme of searching. The quest for love often takes precedence over love in Winterson’s work, as in *The Passion* and in the overall urge to write about adultery where the lover looks for his/her other half. The paraphrasing of Orlando’s endless search is another addition to the theme of the quest.

It is, however, curious that she omits the details of what it is that drives Orlando insane in Ariosto’s version. This could have been an ideal opportunity for Winterson to further her discourse on the association of language with love, as Orlando’s temporary downfall comes about because he sees his paramour’s name, Angelica, inscribed in various places in the forest. Her name is written in association with her lover Medor. When Orlando reads their two names carved together on trees, rocks and in the lodging house where he stays he loses all rationality. A supposition for the reasoning behind Winterson’s silence on this is that this extract would highlight the power language, as the written word, has over human ‘nature’ and would not fit in with the aspect of *The Powerbook* that adheres to dual thinking and the authority of the writer. Ali/Alix claims to be able to master language. It is for her a tool to use rather than a form that can master her as it does Orlando.

Another link between Calvino’s essay about reading the classics and *The Powerbook* is his justification and comparisons between desire, reading, and eating an artichoke:

The world's reality presents itself to our eyes as multiple, prickly, and as densely superimposed layers. Like an artichoke. What counts for us in a work of literature is the possibility of being able to continue to unpeel it like a never-ending artichoke, discovering more and more new dimensions in reading. (197)

By tracking Winterson's reading in *The Powerbook* the concern with courtly love is made evident. The invocation of these tales such as *Orlando Furioso* and Lancelot and Guinevere are not only a means for paying homage to these earlier texts, but are also layering the novel like the artichoke metaphor favoured by Calvino and Winterson:

The artichoke arrived and I began to peel it away, fold by fold, layer by layer, dipping it. There is no secret about eating artichoke, or what the act resembles. Nothing else gives itself up so satisfyingly towards its centre. Nothing else promises and rewards. The tiny hairs are part of the pleasure. (TP 49)

Oral sex is the undercurrent to this passage, but in relation to Calvino's metaphor, there is also a concern with layers and with finding the truth. The artichoke differs for Ali/Alix and Calvino because in *The Powerbook* there is a centre and therefore an end to the layers.⁶ The similarity of the metaphor exists in the promise of pleasure and

⁶ Winterson's website informs the readers of her favourite books and authors. In response to the question, "Who do you like to read?" she replies, "I'm an old-fashioned girl. That is, I'm on the side of Harold Bloom. Everybody should read the Canon of Western Literature, even if you don't accept it as canonical. For a reader, it's riches. For a writer, it's roots." (jeanettewinterson.com FAQ). Bloom's *The Western Canon* also returns the reader to Woolf. Chapter nineteen, 'Woolf's *Orlando*: Feminism as the Love of Reading', is useful for our purposes here. This *Orlando* returns us to chapter three of this thesis, and the name *Orlando* links Woolf and Bloom to *The Powerbook* as well. It echoes different literary heritages inherent in the act of reading as the names Malory of *Le Morte D'Arthur* fame and Mallory the Everest mountaineer. Bloom's text also signals how Woolf's *Orlando* could be interpreted from an angle other than gender-swapping and time travel: "*Orlando*'s current fame has nearly everything to do with the hero-heroine's sexual metamorphosis and owes very little to what matters in the book: comedy characterization, and an intense love of the major eras of English literature" (439).

the obviousness that this is food. Reading is compared favourably to eating and becomes another sensation to love. The 'classics' for Calvino and Winterson are also a constant source of newness.

Taking pleasure in reading is specifically examined in *The Powerbook* with the inclusion of Paolo and Francesca's tale. This is because they are reading about Lancelot and Guinevere as an introduction to their illicit lovemaking after Francesca has married Paolo's brother. Reading is also a disguise for their continued affair. It is suggested that it is their reading matter that inspires their love, as though it is creating them, and it also hints at justifying their adultery. Winterson is expanding on and re-creating Canto V of Dante's *Inferno*, where Francesca explains her 'sins': "Several times that reading urged our eyes to meet and took the colour from our faces, but one moment alone it was that overcame us" (*Inferno* 55). Fiction has the effect of creating their love but their affair may also be interpreted as being vindicated by what they have read.

Winterson avoids moralising about her lovers and as argued in chapter six of this thesis the theme of adultery often resurfaces in her work. It is exonerated from criticism as Winterson searches for the truest form of love. The reading of Lancelot's story, and the explanations as to why he does not see the Grail, are examined in *The Powerbook* in order to dispute the hierarchy that divine love has over mortal love. Consequently, the novel avoids becoming a morality tale. *The Powerbook* offers two readings. The first is the traditional one, which Ali/Alix disputes: "human passion is no substitute for divine love" (188). The second reading, and the one Ali/Alix favours, is that Lancelot fails because he cannot distinguish between "love's symbol and what it represents" (188). He does not realise that his love for Guinevere makes Guinevere his Grail.

One of the reasons that *The Powerbook* embraces taking pleasure in the written word is clarified by Ali/Alix's description of her childhood. As she was growing up reading and writing were forbidden in Muck House (which is surely a parody of 'Buck House'): "My mother could do both, my father could do neither, therefore they had no value" (TP 140). Father has replaced Jeanette's mother as the childhood ogre and is a metaphor for questioning the hegemony of nurturing parental love. Ali/Alix offers the story of her life as one more chapter in this novel obsessed with stories about ruinous love. Her father is depicted as an ignorant tyrant and the fairy tale of her upbringing undermines the argument that children are naturally adored and loved. Ali/Alix describes her home life thus:

There was possession, fear, sentimentality, desire, but not love. This has left me with certain absences and certain intensities. Absent is any real sense of family, of bonding, of belonging. Intensified is a longing for love as it really is – as freedom, abundance, generosity, passion. What Dante calls 'the love that moves the sun and the other stars'. (TP 187)

As mentioned earlier, Dante's words are taken from the end of *Paradise*, and are the last words available for explaining what love is. Their inclusion acts as a stamp of authority that highlights all the more how Ali/Alix's childhood had neither culture nor affection.

Father has a supply of hazardous liquids in the cellar and Ali/Alix is forbidden to go near them. Like every other prohibition it of course became a temptation: "At the end of a row of jars coloured like dreams was an opaque jar with a heart drawn on it and a dagger through the heart. I put up my hand to touch it, and in that second my hand was grabbed from behind" (TP 142). Father stops her, telling her never to touch it: "If that gets loose we're finished" (TP 142). Love is in the jar and Ali/Alix learns

that “love is a hazardous liquid” (TP 142). The desire for the forbidden, which is love in this case, resembles poison and must be avoided. The motif of the tempting forbidden fruit, or jar, reappears again when the adult Ali/Alix falls in love with another married woman.

Father is an archetype and even a cliché for Lacan’s Law of the Father. *The Powerbook* has two other examples of this figure: Ali’s father wants to drown her at birth until her mother persuades him that they could dress her up as a boy. The other is Francesca de Rimini’s father who exchanges her in marriage for peace with Paolo’s brother. The traffic in women, as described by Gayle Rubin, is drawn upon by Winterson and appears old-fashioned in the light of changes in feminist theory. This makes this latest novel appear to be a forerunner to *Oranges*, as though this has been written at the beginning of the second wave of twentieth-century feminism instead of thirty years later.

A more cynical view of Ali/Alix drawing on these fathers as well as her own is that this constructs her as a romantic heroine who is unable to make her own decisions because of the environment she has been raised in. The subtle irony of Ali/Alix’s story should not be overlooked as she calls one of her chapters ‘blame my parents’ and satirises the stereotype of the liberal left culture that tends to blame rather than take responsibility.

This willingness to shirk responsibility is implicit when Ali/Alix describes her lover as another who is in control, as though she makes Ali/Alix powerless by seduction. It is revealed that the narrator is cautious about becoming involved with her lover because she has previously been disappointed by a former, married girlfriend. Ali/Alix’s relationship with this woman resembles the narrator’s relationship with Louise towards the end of *Written as the Body* as Ali/Alix describes how the end of

this love affair was like a haunting (*TP* 51). Ali/Alix feels as though she has had an amputation of the heart and this new lover, Tulip, whom the novel revolves around, says she wants to rescue Ali/Alix from the past, from pain (*TP* 54). The promise of being rescued makes it clear that the narrator is seduced by the idea of romantic love, as though she has become Guinevere to her lover's Lancelot, or Alice in search of Jove, or Henri pining for Villanelle, or Villanelle waiting outside her lover's house.

Lancelot dominates the chapter 'search' and his words are a template for Tulip's when she wants to be the saviour: "It began with a promise: 'While I am living I shall rescue you'" (*TP* 67). Lancelot is, however, incomparable to this indecisive lover who leaves Ali/Alix in the hotel room in Paris. Tulip is consistently drawn as equivocal to committing to the promises that she makes. In fairness she has an impossible hero to live up to because Lancelot famously embodies the loyal constancy of a knight who would risk death and dishonour for his lady. But, as C. S. Lewis points out, and as I have pointed out in chapter two of this thesis, Lancelot appears to hesitate in Chrétien de Troyes' version of the story and demonstrates a perceived 'lukewarmness' towards Guinevere.

Tulip is also a version of Guinevere in wanting marriage but also wanting more: "Inside her marriage there were too many clocks and not enough time. Too much furniture and too little space. Outside her marriage, there would be nothing to hold her, nothing to shape her" (*TP* 39). Guinevere has been compared to Villanelle earlier in this thesis and it is as though this queen exemplifies exactly what it is to be the unattainable object of desire for the Winterson lover. Guinevere is the archetype for the beloved who will never fully reciprocate the love she has received from her lover. Winterson is searching for the lover who will speak the truth about loving the beloved and will not equivocate. In previous relationships the narrator has heard the same

arguments that Tulip uses about not wanting commitment, and has even used them herself: “They tell some truth, but not all the truth, and the truth they deny is a truth about the heart. The body can compromise and the mind can be seduced by it. Only the heart protests. The heart. Carbon-based primitive in a silicon world” (TP 40).

Ali/Alix is in love with romantic love and with the impossible situation of wanting a heroine who will offer true love in meatspace. She thinks her lover interprets her as “a little light reading. A bedtime story” (TP 83), and believes the only power she has “is the negative power of withdrawal” (TP 187). Ali/Alix continues, “a relationship where one person has no power or negative power, isn’t a relationship, it’s the bond between master and slave” (TP 187). These references indicate that there is masochism in Ali/Alix’s version of love as it calls for a submission to the idea of all-powerful love, even though this will certainly mean another disappointment. By loving the unattainable object the lover Ali/Alix is becoming a victim of romantic love.

This last reference to the bond between master and slave is once more reminiscent of Hegelian reasoning. Just after this rumination over power Ali/Alix admits to intentionally putting herself in the way of suffering, “as a test, as a measure” (TP 188), and thinks that the tamer love is, “the farther away it is from love” (TP 189). This accepts the master-slave dichotomy true to Belsey’s previously cited interpretation, of the impossible opposition that true love claims to be able to unify. It also accords with the polarity Mellor associates with ‘male’ Romanticism. Ali/Alix’s self-confessed masochism balances the idealisation of love and this prevents the novel from over-idealising love as she ruminates over the power struggle that is implicit in her relationship with Tulip. Nevertheless, as with *The Passion*, the poles that separate

lovers are made overt in this novel in conjunction with the urge towards unification, or synthesis, in the desire for overcoming the obstacles that keep the lovers apart.

As well as being a novel that is concerned with the tension that holds self and other separate *The Powerbook* also focuses on the self's struggle with, and love for, the past. The narrative refers to its predecessors, in terms of earlier Winterson novels, up to the point of being narcissistic as when Tulip claims she has never heard of *The Passion* (TP 26). Later in the novel, in Paris, Ali/Alix tells Tulip how she is writing about, "Boundaries. Desire", and when asked what her other books are about she replies, "Boundaries. Desire" (TP 35). The 'in jokes' come perilously close to shutting out newcomers, or those who are ambivalent about Winterson's novels generally. Tulip has never heard of *The Passion*, though, and this suggests that Winterson is indulging herself and her reading public with an awareness of repeated themes. Self-parody is overlooked in the previously cited reviews by Showalter and Baker but it is evident in these references. As the last novel in the cycle, which began with *Oranges*, Winterson holds the mirror up to her work as a part of this ending.

This holding up of the mirror could be described as self-absorption, or perceived as Winterson going through her own textual looking-glass. It may even be claimed that Winterson is guilty of the crime of self-love, in spite of a defence that remembers she is capable of self-parody. Irving Singer outlines how deeply embedded the distaste for self-love is in Western culture and this may explain why Winterson is not always popular with her reviewers. After Winterson nominated *Written on the Body* as novel of the year it is clear that she is not the most self-effacing of writers. Singer's *The Pursuit of Love* offers an explanation of the sin of narcissism in Christian culture and this opens a way for understanding the, at times, vitriolic treatment she has received in some of the reviews of her novels: "Self-love is thought to be a fall from grace, a

manifestation of pride, as in Lucifer, or else an animalistic substratum that humankind must transcend if it can ever attain authentic love” (75). This fall from grace is of course related to the New Testament’s dislike for self-love and is the ‘sin’ that Winterson is often found guilty of.

Julie Burchill’s article ‘My Enemy Has Written a Bad Book’ exemplifies the harsher media vilification that Winterson has received. Burchill declares that *Written on the Body* was “The Great Bad Novel of the Nineties” when reviewing *Art and Lies* (26). Burchill’s complete misreading of *Written on the Body* undermines the strength of her attack, for example: “But finally Louise makes up her mind, and stops dying, and lives till a ripe old age to be shagged silly by the nameless hero/ine (Jeanette)” (26). Michèle Roberts genders these rather personal criticisms and recognises that the ‘sin’ of self-love is often critiqued in female rather than male writers: “We’re harsher on girls who show off than boys. Boys will be boys, but bad girls are monstrous” (31).

Linda Hutcheon re-frames metafiction as narcissism in *Narcissistic Narrative*. She conscientiously reminds the reader that the use of metafiction is as old as Ovid, but also discusses its use in the late twentieth century:

What has always been a truism of fiction, though rarely made conscious, is brought to the fore in modern texts: the making of fictive worlds and the constructive, creative functioning of language itself are now self-consciously shared by author and reader. The latter is no longer asked merely to recognize that fictional objects are “like life”; he is asked to participate in the creation of worlds and of meaning, through language.

(30)

Hutcheon stresses the paradoxical position of the reader, who is forced to acknowledge “the fictionality of the world he is creating”, and yet is caught up in the

“very real” human act of making sense of experience (30). This contradiction arises in *The Powerbook* as the narrator struggles between trying to make sense of love but is only able to come close to managing it through other works of fiction.

The mirror associated with narcissism is present in *Gut Symmetries* and in the description of sex between Ali/Alix and her lover in *The Powerbook*:

Sex between women is mirror geography. The subtlety of its secret – utterly the same, utterly different. You are a looking-glass world. You are the hidden place that opens to me on the other side of the glass. I touch your smooth surface and then my fingers sink through to the other side. You are what the mirror reflects and invents. (*TP* 174)

In *Gut Symmetries* Alice describes sex between her and Stella as such:

The reflecting image of a woman with a woman is seductive. I enjoyed looking at her in a way that was forbidden to me, this self on self, self as desirer and desired, had a frankness to it I had not been invited to discover. Desiring her I felt my own desirability. It was an act of power but not power over her. I was my own conquest. (*GS* 119)

The Powerbook and *Gut Symmetries* use the mirror to discuss sex between women, but neither novel believes that lesbianism is just a form of narcissism. There is instead a mild flirtation with the concept before the narrators observe that whilst there are similarities between women’s bodies, there are also differences. Alice’s position is strengthened in her recognition of her own power and individuality.

The sense of lack that Alice experiences, up to the point of realising her own desirability, is comparable to Ali/Alix’s sense of absence in her upbringing. Ali/Alix explains her need for love as specific to her childhood which left an emotional void: “I think it’s fair to say that my parents were not loved as children, that they did not

love me. There was possession, fear, sentimentality, desire, but not love. This has left me with certain absences and certain intensities” (*TP* 187). In this instance it is implied that it is nurture rather than nature that has created this gap that she is constantly searching to fill. The little love that Ali/Alix receives comes from her mother, and the stories she tells.

Ali/Alix’s mother is comparable to Jeanette’s in *Oranges* and Henri’s in *The Passion* in that she is described as an exile: “Like other exiles, her longing grew a narrative of its own. Her desire told itself as memory. Her past was a place that none of us could visit without her. It was the only kingdom she could control” (*TP* 143). Mrs Muck used to tell of how when she was younger fish would jump into her pan on command and were as tame as fleas (*TP* 143). As she spins these magic realist inventions she is temporarily empowered, much as her daughter attempts over the internet when offering ‘you’ the story about Ali smuggling tulips. As with Jeanette and her mother in *Oranges* the power of discourse is realised first by the older woman, which in turn influences the daughter’s story-telling techniques.

Conclusively, the freedom for just one night that Ali the narrator offers Tulip is formed by invention. The lies of adultery and fictionalising resurface as Ali/Alix seduces her married lover, or she seduces her. The call to freedom also echoes the voices of Henri, Jordan and the narrator of *Written on the Body* as they all fear both commitment and being alone. Ali/Alix is a composite of these characters in her tension between wanting to be alone and longing for her lover.

Her ‘helpers’ for navigating round life are stories rather than ‘real’ people and she describes communicating by the internet as throwing things overboard. The power of narrative rests on the power of the mind and the stories that can be told. ‘True’ love, despite theory and history and the failure that will always surround romantic fiction, is

still, fifteen years later, the dream Winterson's novels aspire to. This is despite the readers of her main novels having learned enough to know that this is an enterprise that will never have a happy ending. The unwillingness to portray a successful romance (be that heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual) distances her work from traditional, heterosexual romantic fiction but there is still a dependency on understanding love as a transcendent, idealised motif. The cycle of Winterson's work depends on this faith in the power of love - from *Oranges* to *The Powerbook*. The stories that *The Powerbook* tells are not only about past literary lovers but are also re-writings of Winterson's earlier love stories, including Jeanette's love for her mother. The self-consciousness of *The Powerbook* knowingly realises that true love is implausible, which occurs when Ali/Alix delineates her masochism, but the repeated thematic use of the ideal of love reveals an unaltered longing for unattainable, transcendental love.

Conclusion

In many ways *The Powerbook* inadvertently acts as a conclusion for this thesis. It contains features that have appeared in Winterson's earlier novels such as the adopted narrator who loves language and who idealises love. This narrator is also another one who succumbs to falling in love with somebody who is wary of commitment. It is, to date, the latest novel and a synthesis of its predecessors as Winterson continues to renegotiate the same paths that she has already taken. The centrality of the theme of love emphasises its connection to its past in terms of Winterson's oeuvre all the more.

In the Introduction I mention that there is a predictable quality about Winterson's writing and this claim holds true after summarising how *The Powerbook* belongs to a cycle of Winterson's work. It becomes evident on reading Winterson's novels in succession that she is writing within her own constructed vision of the world, where love is of paramount importance. The constant return to similar themes and devices adds layers of meaning to her work. When her novels are recognised as a cycle, rather than simply repetitious, a formidable act can be seen to have taken place over these fifteen years of writing. There is also, of course, a negative aspect to this predictability in that her last two novels may equally be described as over-familiar before we have even read them. It is to be hoped that *The Powerbook* is, as Winterson claims, the last in a cycle and that in the future she will begin to leave her past behind.

In this cycle of work love resembles a faith and is often described as inevitable. From this perspective Winterson's writings may be interpreted as conservative and restrictive in that love has become inescapable. The ambiguity that infiltrates all of these seven main novels balances this limiting of freedom, however, as love is also the force that can transform. This becomes most apparent in the account I have given

of *The Passion*, where passion is instrumental in both imprisoning and liberating Henri. When it is liberating, Winterson represents romantic love as no longer just “the bait in the marriage trap” as it was for many second-wave feminists according to Stevi Jackson (‘Women’ 50). Winterson’s insistence on disrupting the dominance of the heterosexual romantic discourse is my basis for appreciating the extent to which she has recuperated love from its position as a marginalising discourse. Love is still the ‘bait’ when it is used as a form of control and is notably a means for oppression for the twelve princesses in *Sexing the Cherry* and for Picasso in *Art and Lies*, but it is also the means to transform and improve upon the ‘lukewarmness’ of everyday life.

The binary opposition of heterosexuality/homosexuality is deconstructed from *Oranges* onwards, using the love story format to effect the process. Even though Winterson does not explode all binaries, as Laura Doan desires, there is at least always a flirtation with upsetting hierarchical thinking. The deconstruction of opposites emerges in *The Passion*’s devotion to ambiguous passion, and in the grafting metaphor of *Sexing the Cherry*. The unspecified gender of the narrator of *Written on the Body* is a further exploration of (but not adherence to) *différance*. The list continues: in *Art and Lies* the meaning of love and hate is destabilised in the abuse of Picasso when seen in opposition to Handel’s relationship with the Cardinal, and *Gut Symmetries* upsets the binary of the married couple with the introduction of the third term, Alice. In *The Powerbook* the medium of cyberspace is held in tension with, and at times in opposition to, old love stories. All of these examples demonstrate Winterson’s proclivity for disruption and for the questioning of (if not conclusively deconstructing) the dominance of hierarchical thinking.

A defence of Winterson’s insistent assumption that love rather than hate is or should be transcendent leads one to argue that she is drawing a line and claiming an

ethical space amidst binary thinking. Regarding love as transcendent enables the process of binary thinking, but it also may be viewed as assuming faith in an otherwise faithless world. With *Written on the Body*, for example, the narrator is confounded by loss and it is only love that remains for him/her. Furthermore, Jeanette in *Oranges* is disappointed by her mother's and lover's betrayal. It is the idealised love of and for God that magnifies their treachery. It is also this "emotional role model" which determines how Jeanette and other Winterson narrators want to live their lives (O 163).

Winterson's overt refusal to solve her paradoxes of loving allows contradictions to stand and it may be that it is this deliberate ambiguity that fosters antipathy amongst some of her critics. When writers such as Lynn Pykett and Lisa Moore argue that Winterson is not sufficiently engaged with political matters the implication is that Winterson is too ambiguous in her commitment to materiality. It is as though she is being penalised for not being transparent enough in her hatred of homophobia. This perceived fault in Winterson's writing may be due to her openness about her own sexuality, as though she should now be a mouthpiece for other marginally represented figures as well as a novelist. The responsibility for fairly representing those who are marginalised surely does not just belong to lesbian or male homosexual writers. Although I believe Winterson demonstrates some commitment to challenging homophobia in her work, this is not her duty. Winterson's use of ambiguity, fantasy and love are, however, ironically effective political weapons in challenging the dominant discourse of heterosexuality because they dispute the sanctity of marriage and undermine the concept of the natural. The last lines of *Art Objects* re-state how Winterson asks to be criticised only for her writing and not her personal life and I believe this plea is relevant for critics across the political spectrum: "Judge the work

not the writer seems to be what a new generation is prepared to do. It is for a new generation that I write" (*AO* 192)

When judging the work conclusively, however, each novel has been found to be limited in its urge to destabilise and deconstruct because of love. This is despite love being described at best as bittersweet and imprisoning and lethal at its most harrowing. The paradox of Winterson's cycle of novels is that this reverence for love is maintained when it is simultaneously depicted as enslaving. Love in Winterson's oeuvre must ultimately be conceived as upholding the master/slave binary when examining her work in binary terms, because although she pushes to destabilise hierarchical thinking, love is indisputably given a transcendent position. This is a perilous argument, because it is compartmentalising Winterson's writing into an either/or position. The attempt to answer the question of whether she is exploding binaries or maintaining them is placing her work within the same (binary) logical framework that is being criticised. It is perhaps fairest to claim that Winterson's novels are not ruled by poststructuralist theory. Her novels are influenced by these currents of thought, but the preference for transcendent love stands in tension with and must ultimately override the deferral of meaning. The difficulties in escaping binary thinking are exposed by Winterson's representations of love and in this thesis' Conclusion. By having to decide conclusively one must contend that the desire for transcendence maintains the binary in her work.

Winterson's continuing act of faith in love is naïve as she holds on to the desire for transcendence whilst simultaneously asking for the deconstruction of barriers to loving. She holds on to this faith just as many of her characters hold on to their talismans in spite of their inefficiency in protecting them from betrayal or disappointment. It is the act of faith in talismans and love, rather than the likelihood

of these lucky charms working, that Winterson continues to be true to. If this is understood as naivety it is also possible that each of Winterson's narrators is a re-visitation of Jeanette in *Oranges*. With this reading, the young Jeanette's child-like innocence is appropriated as each novel continues to desire a love that does not include betrayal or loss.

Whilst proposing a defence that Winterson's writing is naive, it is necessary to also balance this and consider how it is conservative. The love stories included in *The Powerbook* are a reminder of how Winterson is one more writer who belongs to the tradition of idealising love. She positions her work as quest oriented, where the search for love is always worth it - and not just in this latest novel, as Orlando hunts for his object of desire, but in all of the previous ones too. The motif of the Holy Grail resurfaces intermittently and it exemplifies the desirability of love and perfection. The search for love and its idealisation colours all of these seven main novels that have been discussed in this thesis. This inclusion of searching is not just a reminder of how Winterson regards love as transcendent in her work, but it also confirms her position as a writer who desires to be considered alongside Ariosto, Dante, and Woolf. The love for hierarchies is evident once more from this perspective.

The theme of love appears to be timeless, transcendent even, when reading all of Winterson's main novels and this is affirmed in her allegiance to the status of art. Winterson stresses in *Art Objects* how she does not care about fashion "only about permanencies" (AO 5). Winterson's representations of love are intrinsically linked to the desire for permanence when permanence is understood as immortality, as she strives to be regarded as a writer of lasting value. This desire for transcendence, and the consequent maintenance of hierarchical thinking, is disturbing because it means

that Winterson is tacitly overlooking the claims for equality that appear in each of her novels. Transcendence ultimately remains unchallenged.

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