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Literary seductions: subjectivity and desire in the narrative of Angela Carter and Jeanette Winterson

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Tesi Doctoral

Literary Seductions

Subjectivity and Desire in the Narrative of
Angela Carter and Jeanette Winterson

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*A la memòria de la meva àvia,
Teresa Batet Muntané,
per la cambra pròpia,
el sentit de l'humor, i tota la resta*

“Somewhere every culture has an imaginary zone for what it excludes,
and it is that zone we must try to remember today”
— Catherine Clément, “The Guilty One,” in *The Newly Born Woman*, 6

“Oh, how dangerous can a stupid little book be,
especially at the hands of a stupid little girl!”
—Lord Voldemort, in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, film version

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Preliminaries
I. Preliminaries I: Introduction & Rationale

In 1995-96, I wrote a minor dissertation on Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979), in which I discussed the extent to which Carter's tales offered a deconstruction of the obvious binary discourse present in the earlier stories by Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm. A couple of years before, I had discovered Angela Carter's fiction in an undergraduate course on "Utopias and Dystopias", given by Professor Jacqueline A. Hurlley at the Universitat de Barcelona. I read *Heroes and Villains* (1969) in order to meet one of the requirements for the course. Ever since, the text has haunted me.

As part of the research for my minor dissertation, I read a number of re-writings of fairy tales, amongst which was Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* (1985). The inclusion of such a text in a list of feminist re-writings of fairy tales was surprising, to say the least. Whilst reading Winterson's text, I realised that its main aim was not to offer a 'traditional' re-deployment of fairy-tale imagery, plots and motifs; but, instead, to use fantasy and imagination in such a way as to prove how useful they can be to all subjects, and especially to those

who find themselves in hostile circumstances. I became seduced by a text which I found both hilarious and moving, and by its message that fantasy and imagination can effectively save the day, and more.

Haunted and seduced, I decided to write a thesis about the two novels, about their use of desire, fantasy and imagination in relation to the construction of subjectivity. The result is the present study, the aim of which is to offer a critical discourse in which desire and subjectivity in narrative are interrogated. Through my readings of the two narratives by Carter and Winterson, the endeavour is to explore how desire allows the subject to imagine an alternative, utopian location where a narrative of the self, in all its multiplicity, might be effected. My use of the term 'narrative' throughout this study does not refer merely to what is commonly understood as 'the novel', but it is akin to the one described by Roland Barthes in "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative" (1994):

The narratives of the world are numberless [...]; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting ..., stained-glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation [...]. [N]arrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the story of mankind [...].
[I]t is simply there, like life itself! (251-252)

My reasons for focusing exclusively on *Heroes and Villains* and *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* instead of any other texts in the long list of writings by Carter and Winterson, are dwelt on within the corpus of the study. There, I claim that these two texts are 'representative' of the authors' salient interests and motifs, and that they deal with many of the issues which are recurrent in their later

fiction; in the case of Winterson, in her fiction to this day. After all, however, I might attribute my choice to a question of seduction, hence the title for the whole study, which plays with the idea of seduction that texts exert on readers. As a reader, I was captivated by the two texts and their portrait of a subjectivity which was no less bewitching in its multiplicity, by the texts' use of fantasy and imagination as integral elements of 'reality', by the interest in exploring and articulating desire and giving it a (temporary) central location within the text. Finally, I was drawn by the aesthetics of the texts, by the deployment of language, in myriad images, metaphors, motifs and other rhetorical richness.

The structure of the present study is organised around three blocks. The first block, "Preliminaries", contains the present introductory section and a second preliminary chapter entitled "'Which is to be Master': The History of our own Obscurity; Or, Subjectivity, Desire, and Narrative in Con-Text",¹ which carries a theoretical introduction. Although the main theory informing the present project is poststructuralism, I have referred to Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, at times not uncritically, to discuss issues of desire and subjectivity. Initially devised as a means of outlining some fundamental ideas about subjectivity, desire and narrative through the use of theory, the preliminary chapter is not structured as a summary of either psychoanalysis or poststructuralism. Rather, starting from the premise that language constructs reality, it sets out to explore the ways in which subjectivity, desire and narrative may be inter-connected. The first section, "Subjectivity as a Paradox", traces the development of the concept of human identity, from the Cartesian *cogito* to Sigmund Freud's articulation of the unconscious, and Jacques Lacan's theorisation of the subject as an organism-in-

culture. Reference to the Lacanian 'Mirror Stage', which performs a splitting of the subject, is also made. The result is a theorisation of subjectivity in poststructuralist terms, "neither unified, nor an origin" (Belsey 2002: 65), but discursively produced, as the work of Michel Foucault consistently demonstrates.

The second part, "Desire", assesses that which "eludes final definition" (Belsey 1994: 3), but the presence of which can be universally felt, for instance, through the mechanism of seduction. Although seduction may take many forms, the initial seduction is that of the Other which, in turn, mimics an earlier seduction by the Lacanian *Gestalt*, the image of the subject as reflected in the mirror (1977: 3). The mirror is, in turn, theorised as a space where the subject is offered versions of itself, "becoming something or someone else" (Jackson 1981: 88); in other words, a place where the subject metamorphoses and mutates in its constant dynamics to occupy new subject positions.

The third part, "Ambiguous Metamorphoses and Leaking Identities", traces the issue of transformation as a key element against "notions of unique, individual identity," as articulated by Marina Warner (2004 [2002]: 2). Extensively used as a metaphor by Dante and Ovid, among others, metamorphosis becomes a key fictional tool to explore concepts of the self in relation to presumed stability, thus anticipating the theorisation of the poststructuralist subject in process.

The last section in Preliminaries II, "Literary Seductions", starts from an understanding of literature as a mirror. Narrative fiction is thus presented as a space where readers are allowed to catch fleeting glimpses of their multiplicity and endless (per)versions. As such, narrative becomes a specular, transitional

locus where desire can be temporarily articulated, for “stories are about desire” (Belsey 1994: 208), hence their seductiveness.

The second main block of the study, entitled “Literary Reflections”, is, in turn, divided into two, and it contains my analyses of *Heroes and Villains* and *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*. By way of introduction to each text, I have included and commented on a poem which was evocative of each of the text’s main interests. “Dreaming Frankenstein”, by Scottish writer Liz Lochhead, opens the first part, which is divided into five chapters: “Dans un pays inconnu”, which discusses the production of Angela Carter; “Then all was chaos”, which traces in detail the post-nuclear con-text proposed by Carter in the novel; “Nothing but the furious invention of my virgin nights”, which analyses the figure of the exotic Other as a projection of the subject’s desire; and “You Are Year One”, which focuses specifically on Marianne, the protagonist of the novel, as a subject in process. The conclusions to this first part are offered in a separate chapter.

The second part, “Literary Reflections II”, devoted to assessing Jeanette Winterson’s novel and introduced by the poem “Little Red Riding Hood” by Olga Broumas, also has five chapters. The first, entitled “That kind of glorious perversion”, explores the production of the author; “Art and Lies” offers insights into the novel’s presumed (auto)biographical implications and its jeopardy of the distinction between ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’; “Girl Catchers and Porno Turn-Ons” analyses the issue of the representation of lesbian desire within the novel; “Not the Only Fruit” focuses on the multi-faceted character of Jeanette, the protagonist and narrator of the story. The conclusions to this second part occupy a separate chapter.

My work resorts widely to the use of epigraphs and quotes from assorted sources, in an attempt to offer a tapestry of dialogic cross-references, thus illustrating the polyphonic intertextuality of art. It begins with a quote from Catherine Clément's "The Guilty One" (1996 [1975]), which refers to the need to remember what she calls "the imaginary zone" which every culture has "for what it excludes" (1996 [1975]: 6). The present study could be regarded as an attempt to recover that zone and, hopefully, celebrate it. The second quote is from the film version (2003) of J. K. Rowling's popular novel, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998). There, Lord Voldemort, Harry's primordial Other, refers to the danger that "a stupid little book" may have, especially, he claims, "at the hands of a stupid little girl". I found this assertion both debunking and, it might be said, relevant to most critical analyses of literature.

The general conclusions for this study are offered in the final chapter, "'A project that defies completion': Desire, Fantasy, and Personal Utopia", where I assess the way in which desire launches a dynamics by which the subject is able to create an alternative location of personal utopia through the use of fantasy where his/her multiplicity may, in turn, be explored and celebrated. My claim is that this personal utopia is successful precisely because subjectivity is as speculative as the concept of utopia itself, and both participate in the dynamics marked by desire.

In an attempt to have this study partake in the multiplicity of meanings and readings which it proposes, I have not set out to produce a totalising theory, nor a teleological structure by which termination is offered. On the contrary, I have wanted this study to engage with the elusiveness and open-endedness of desire,

allowing its unpredictability to punctuate, in part, my own writing for, in the words of Catherine Belsey, “[w]riting about desire” is “compulsive, a challenge, self-indulgence, anxiety ...” but “above all, [it is] a project that defies completion” (1994: 3).

Notes

¹ The use of con-text with a hyphen is deployed by Barker and Hulme in “Nymphs and Reapers Heavily Vanish: The Discursive Con-texts of *The Tempest*,” included in the volume edited by John Drakakis, *Alternative Shakespeares* (1985). They argue that it proposes “a break from the inequality of the usual text/context relationship. Con-texts are themselves *texts* and must be read *with*: they do not simply make up a background” (236). My own use of the terminology is akin to Barker and Hulme’s as regards the importance bestowed on the texts which exist alongside the literary one, but I chose to capitalise both parts of the term, in an attempt to award the same emphasis to both.

II. Preliminaries II: ‘Which is to be Master’: The history of our own obscurity; Or, Subjectivity, Desire and Narrative in Con-Text

“We are never alone, always in relation. We are born related to an object. We are, in short, Postmodern” —Norman N. Holland, “Postmodern Psychoanalysis”, 299

“Identity is a paradox” — Norman N. Holland, “Postmodern Psychoanalysis”, 303

“Someday we must write the history of our own obscurity —manifest the density of our narcissism”—Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, 83

“Which is to be Master,” claims Humpty Dumpty to a puzzled Alice in *Through the Looking Glass* (1871), soon after he nonchalantly acknowledges that whenever he uses a word, he gives it the meaning that he freely chooses. Thoroughly unconcerned about the ensuing lack of understanding and the consequences of upset communication which his little language games may establish, Humpty Dumpty raises what today would be described as a poststructuralist issue: language constructs reality, and the relationship which words share with their meanings is far from natural.

In his *Course on General Linguistics* (1915) Ferdinand de Saussure describes language as a chain of ‘signs’, a description which has prevailed to this

day. Each 'sign', Saussure claims, is made of a 'signifier', a sound or written image, which is, in turn, related to a 'signified', the meaning ascribed to it (Saussure 1974 [1915]: 111). The relation between the two, following the Saussurean proposition, is arbitrary: no natural link is established between the sound and the concept it identifies. It is, therefore, a relationship that subjects have come to agree on, depending on the language they use and the culture they share. The apparent solidity of reality, largely based on meaning, easily crumbles at the possibility that a word may, one day, come to mean something completely different from what it has meant historically. If, after this one word which suddenly changed its meaning, came another, and then another, it is presumed that absolute chaos would reign. The idea of words suddenly changing their meanings is not so unlikely, as evidenced by multiplicity of meaning, for instance, a little trick of language which has come to be accepted as 'natural', but which may bring about more than one misunderstanding.

Poststructuralism acquires the Saussurean axiom by which meaning is not reflected by language, but produced within it, in so far as signs acquire their meaning in a relational way; that is to say, through their difference from other signs within the linguistic chain.¹ Saussurean theory, however, is readily based on an understanding of meaning as something unmoveable:

A linguistic system is a series of differences of sound combined with differences of ideas, but the pairing of a certain number of acoustical signs with as many cuts made from the mass of thought engenders a system of values, and this system serves as the effective link between the phonic and psychological elements within each sign. Although

both the signified and the signifier are purely differential and negative when considered separately, their combination is a positive fact.

(Saussure 1974 [1915]: 120)

Hence, although meaning is effectively located within the linguistic correlation in constant deferral, Saussure fails to acknowledge plurality of meaning, changes in meaning, or even language games of the Humpty-Dumpty variety. It is with Jacques Derrida’s concept of *différance* that the idea that meaning is acquired through difference is thoroughly acknowledged. For Derrida, the space between signs within the linguistic chain is, in itself, a source of meaning:

Différance is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the *spacing* by means of which elements are related to each other. The spacing is the simultaneously active and passive ... production of the intervals without which the ‘full’ terms would not signify, would not function. ... It confirms that the subject ... the conscious and speaking subject, depends upon the system of differences and the movement of *différance*, that the subject is constituted only in being divided from itself, in becoming space, in temporizing, in referral ... (Derrida 1981: 27, 29, italics in original)

From the suddenly jeopardised solidity of a reality exclusively constructed by language, then, issues a related and equally adventurous notion. If language constructs reality, it also constructs our sense of ourselves; it may even construct, it could be argued, ‘ourselves’; hence Derrida’s reference to the subject in his formulation of *différance* above. Within such poststructuralist politics of language and subjectivity, whereby “[s]ubjectivity is produced in a whole range of

discursive practices” and “[l]anguage constructs the individual’s subjectivity in ways which are socially specific” (Weedon 1994 [1987]: 21), subjectivity becomes as imperilled a term as reality itself, where “the subject is constituted *only in being divided from itself, in becoming space*” (Derrida 1981: 29, my italics). Humpty Dumpty’s proposal, much to Alice’s chagrin, even much to our own chagrin, is not so far-fetched, after all. The question, indeed, is which is to be Master (of words, of reality, of our selves).²

Part I: Subjectivity as Paradox

“We none of us know quite what we mean when we say ‘I’” —Catherine Belsey, *Poststructuralism: A Very Short Introduction*, 67-68

“I am not where I think and I think where I am not” —Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, 33

It all began with René Descartes. The fundamental issue of subjectivity and the way in which it has been formulated over many centuries, was constituted by the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*, which established rationality as the basis of existence, on which the idea of ‘common sense’ has been based. Descartes, however, was not the only one to busy himself with explorations on human subjectivity. As Roy Porter argues, the concept has been contingent to change, to a greater or lesser degree, over the centuries:

The Greeks believed they were the playthings of fate, Christians saw themselves as miserable sinners, Descartes thought that man was a thinker, liberals stressed self-determination, Romantics self-expression, while Freud invited you to go and lie upon the couch. The fundamental issue of identity has been endlessly posed by

philosophers, poets, psychiatrists, and people at large. But if the question has stayed the same, the answers have changed over time.

(1997: 1)

It is indeed the answers that provide the key to understanding how subjects have viewed themselves throughout history.³ The narrative of these answers, then, may provide insight into the transformation that the notion of identity has undergone for the human subject, a topic which has not only occupied pages and pages of volumes of philosophy, poetry and psychiatry in the past, but which continues to exert a peculiar fascination to this day.

The cultural and philosophical baggage of the Renaissance inspired the doctrine of humanism, which contributed to the issue of subjectivity through its categorical opposition to the Christian belief that human beings were no more than “miserable sinners” (Porter 1997: 1). This was substituted by the endorsement to the notion of ‘man’ as “the apex of creation, the master of nature, the wonder of the world” (Porter 1997: 3). This conclusively androcentric principle prompts the subject to move from the bottom of the feudal pyramid to its very top or, rather, to dispose of pyramids altogether in order to build a world where the subject is made to occupy a central position, even if this means having to share the place with a somewhat blurred idea of god.

René Descartes may have started from the premise of the centrality of the individual when he proposed the conscious and rational self as the ultimate source of understanding, with his aforementioned *cogito*. In the popularised Cartesian economics, ‘man’ becomes unique in the universe, equipped with a conscious mind which ultimately allows him to know every aspect of himself. No trace of

the instinctive nature of human beings is to be found within this proposition. With Descartes, 'man' becomes, if anything, a rational creature, the origin of all meaning and coherence (Descartes 1968: 53-54).

Following Descartes, John Locke, in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), describes the mind as a home that becomes gradually furnished with information, an interesting development in so far as, all of a sudden, the human being is able to build his rationality and therefore himself, so that he becomes not only "the producer but also the product of social development and the civilizing process" (Porter 1997: 4). Descartes's impact is found not only in Lockean philosophy; it became the basis of the Humanist discourse, which presumes subjectivity to be based on the predicament that somewhere within the subject exists a coherent and unified core, an 'essence' which is the origin of Truth, the source of rationality and the much-praised 'common sense', still used to dismiss behaviours or attitudes which society may label as 'eccentric'. Reason, through common sense, provides human beings with the key to discern what is 'right' and what is 'wrong' in a paradoxically instinctive manner. The success of such a theory lies primarily in the illusive access to a disreputable idea of Truth that it grants the individual. Chris Weedon argues that "its power comes from its claim to be natural, obvious and therefore true. It looks to 'human nature' to guarantee its version of reality. It is the medium through which already 'fixed' truths about the world, society and individuals are expressed" (1994 [1987]: 77). With its postulation that language, as an expression of rationality, must be transparent and "undistorted by such things as 'ideology'" (Weedon 1994 [1987]: 77), by which the world can be discerned through the easy process of naming;

together with its essentialist view that human identity is stable and, therefore, fixed and coherent, Humanism “offers a sense of security to individual subjects” (Weedon 1994 [1987]: 83) which is, at the best of times, difficult to counteract.

The notion of individuality climaxed with the American Constitution and the democratic tenets disseminated by the French Revolution. During the nineteenth century, Romanticism opened new paths for the expression of the self, especially with the work of such philosophers as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, who centred their judgements around the solitary individual (Porter 1997: 7). The ultimate disclosure in the unending quest for subjectivity, however, was provided by Sigmund Freud and his articulation of the widespread notion of the ‘unconscious’.

For the first time in the history of thought, and according to the precepts established by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), part of the ‘real’ self lurked in what was safely concealed in the Bluebeard’s chamber of the unconscious mind.⁴ The repressed, dark desires which would only come to the surface in uncanny disguises such as hysteria were taken as a key to the categorical discerning of the human self. Roy Porter explains how “[s]elf-discovery had become a journey into inner space;” and “[e]xploration of this seemingly alien realm was to have the profoundest implications for modern psychiatry, art and literature” (Porter 1997: 7).

The key term in Psychoanalysis is difference (Belsey 2002: 56). Jacques Lacan’s poststructuralist reinterpretations of Freudian theory in the light of Saussurean philosophy, allowed him to articulate difference as a concept which was the basis not only of the relation of the subject with other subjects, but also of

the relation of the subject with itself. “Lacan’s subject,” Catherine Belsey writes, “is divided against itself; ‘other ... than it is’, dissatisfied —and desiring” (2002: 57). Although the issue of desire will be developed in the next section of the present chapter, brief reference to the centrality of desire in the construction of subjectivity will be made here.

Within Lacanian theory, desire stands as the central presence/absence around which subjectivity is constructed. The truth of desire, its articulation within a cognitive level, remains untold, probably because it is in the very nature of desire to elude answers and definition. Yet, desire is an integral part of the subject, if we are to believe Lacan, so integral in fact, that our subjectivity is formed in relation to a lost object that we ‘desire’ to go back to, to recover.

Lacan understands the human being as an organism-in-culture, a paradox which bears the crux of all its dissatisfactions. One is not born a subject, but one becomes one through the seemingly easy process of internalising culture. This takes place at the point of entry of the individual into the symbolic order of language, a tool for which the individual is obviously equipped, but which is alien to it, Other, in so far as it belongs in the realm of culture, it is not organic. Language pre-exists the subject, it is there before the subject makes its first appearance on the stage of culture, hence its strangeness to the organic being that the subject is. This alien product, nevertheless, is the only means by which we can clear up, however momentarily, the sudden gap which has been established between us and others while paradoxically making the gap even more obvious through the use of a product that is irremediably foreign:

In this way, the little human organism, which begins with no sense of a distinction between itself and the world, gets separated off from its surroundings and is obliged to formulate its demands in terms of the differences already available in language. (Belsey 2002: 58)

The above account is desolate, but appropriate. Lacan’s description of the frail status of the ‘I’ was first assessed in a conference paper which he delivered in Zürich in 1949, entitled “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience”. In this lecture, he theorises the entry of the subject into the symbolic of language, laws and social processes through a metaphor which has become both popular and controversial within psychoanalysis: the *stade du miroir*. The Mirror Stage, Lacan claims, inaugurates a process at the end of which the little human organism will acquire his/her place in the symbolic order of culture. It occurs around the age of six to eighteen months, when the child who, up to this moment conceived of no separation between its body and its surroundings, recognises its own image when placed in front of a mirror. For Lacan, this apparently trivial event places the subject in a “fictional direction”, in so far as “the total form of the body by which the subject anticipates in a mirage the maturation of his power is given him only as *Gestalt*, that is to say, in an exteriority in which this form is certainly more constituent than constituted” (1977: 2-3). This *Gestalt* “symbolizes the mental permanence of the *I*, at the same time it prefigures its alienating destination” (Lacan 1977: 3). The use of the German term *Gestalt* —figure— is accurate, in so far as, as Lacan claims, the image that the child recognises in the mirror is an anticipation “in a *mirage*” of “the maturation of his *power*” (1977: 2-3, my italics). This ‘figure’

grants the child its identity, but is no more than that, an image which is seductive in so far as it is a unified projection of coherence. This is how the subject adopts “the armour of an alienating identity” (Lacan 1977: 4), through the identification with the seductive image of its physical form, which is constituent of a “mental permanence” (1977: 33), at once itself and not really itself.

Through this apparently easy process, a split is effected upon the subject, a split which prefigures a difference between the I who is watching and the I who is being watched. The subsequent entry into the symbolic through the acquisition of language entails another, metaphorical split between the I who speaks and the I who is represented in speech. Chris Weedon summarises the process with the following words:

Just as the infant of the mirror phase misrecognizes itself as unified and in physical control of itself, so the speaking subject in the symbolic order misrecognizes itself and its utterance as one and assumes that it is the author of meaning. (1994 [1987]: 52)

In more cryptic and extravagant style, Lacan makes a similar point about misrecognition in language when he claims: “I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object” (1977: 86). Becoming a subject, therefore, is a process based on the paradoxical premise of losing oneself like an object (of language) whilst assuming that the author of the utterance is in control of meaning, that he/she is ‘Master’, to use Humpty Dumpty’s terminology. To clarify comprehension on the idea that meaning may never be controlled and there is always a gap—a difference—between the I who speaks and the I who is, Lacan directs his readers to Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams*, where the

indication that the unconscious operates according to its own organising principles was first made (Bristow 1997: 87).

In the process of losing itself in language like an object, the little human organism loses something else: that which is organic in its component, something which, being outside signification cannot be articulated within language, for it has no name within this new formulation. Lacan, however, does find a name for it; he labels this organic loss ‘the real’. Although forlorn, the real never ceases to be present in existence and it:

... returns to disturb and disrupt our engagement with a reality we imagine we know. Unable to use the existing language, the lost real makes its effects felt in dreams, slips of the tongue, puns, jokes, or symptoms marked on the body, illnesses or disabilities that seem to have no physiological cause. (Belsey 2002: 58)

The gap which the loss of the real brings about, the dissatisfaction of the organism which is suddenly propelled into a world of signifiers which are alien to it, is what leads to the birth of desire: “[i]t is the assumption of castration [in the sense of loss] that creates the lack upon which desire is instituted” (Lacan 1966: 852). Desire, therefore, is related to a loss which creates a lack that cannot be signified and, as such, it cannot be articulated in the symbolic order, the place which is symbolic in so far as it is ruled by (linguistic) symbols.⁵

With this state of affairs, the key term in Psychoanalysis, difference, is understood in its full signification. We are different from ourselves and within ourselves. Engaged with a reality we imagine we know, we become foreigners in our own country, inhabited by a stranger who is, at the same time, us and not us.

This is the premise from which Julia Kristeva builds her theory of the stranger within the subject in *Strangers to Ourselves* (1989), where she invites the subject to recognise its own “uncanny strangeness”:

Our disturbing otherness ... is what bursts in to confront that ‘demon’, that threat, that apprehension generated by the protective apparition of the other *at the heart of what we persist in maintaining as a proper, solid ‘us’*. By recognizing *our* [sic] uncanny strangeness we shall neither suffer from it nor enjoy it from the outside. The foreigner is within me, hence we are all foreigners. If I am a foreigner, then there are no foreigners. (1991 [1989]: 191, my italics except where noted)

In a *Catch 22* situation, the very definition of culture is what brings about dissatisfaction, the loss of the real, and our own grotesque outlandishness, in so far as it is impossible to inhabit culture by nature, there is nothing natural in culture, as Jacques Derrida argues in *Monolingualism of the Other* (1996) and Jeanette Winterson summarises by describing “[l]ife” as “a foreign language” (1988 [1987]: 34).

The subject which springs from the notion that living in culture is living in a kind of constant exile is the subject of poststructuralism: “neither *unified*, nor an *origin*, and ... thus a far cry from the *unique individual* who has traditionally represented *humanity* in the Free West” (Belsey 2002: 65, my italics). In absolute opposition to the Cartesian *cogito* and the coherent Cartesian subject it proposes, poststructuralism understands consciousness as “an effect of signification” (Belsey 2002: 66). In other words, we are not what we think, in every sense of the

sentence, by which “[t]he free individual is no longer either individual nor free” (Belsey 2002: 66).⁶

It is in the work of Michel Foucault that the poststructuralist postulates of the plurality of meaning and the contingent nature of subjectivity are incorporated within a theory of discursive power. Throughout his work, Foucault busies himself with the study of how discourse may constitute individual subjects, constantly insisting on the importance of historical specificity. Discourses are described as “ways of constituting knowledge” (Weedon 1994 [1987]: 108), which includes the understanding and internalisation of such presumed ‘natural’ items as the body or thoughts. Within Foucauldian economics, the meaning of the body or sexuality is far from ‘natural’; it is, rather, defined by a network of power relations integrated by historically specific discourses. His perspective, however, is not totalitarian. Foucault does not conceive of discourses as mechanisms closed in on themselves; on the contrary, the very organisation of one discourse and its implied subject positions, brings about the possibility of alternative subjectivities which might subvert the power established by the initial discourse: “[d]iscourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it but it also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault 1990 [1976]: 101). This does not imply, however, that a discourse may bring about its own binary opposite:

There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same

strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy. (Foucault 1990 [1976]: 101-102)⁷

A discourse of power, according to Foucault, bears the inscription of its own possibility of resistance to the power it has established. In other words, the potentiality of a discourse of power implies that it is already 'infected' by its own resistance to it, "without changing [its] form" (1990 [1976]: 102).

With the notion of a discursive subject which is not produced 'within' itself, from which nothing originates, since meaning is also produced outside it, and which is the result of the desire for an organic loss, the presumed binary between a knowledge which is 'objective' as opposed to one which is 'subjective' irremediably vanishes: "[w]hat is outside the subject constitutes subjectivity; the subject invades the objectivity of what it knows" (Belsey 2002: 73). Hence, binary oppositions crumble at the understanding that the meaning of one set in the binary will always be 'infected' or permeated by the meaning of its antithetical definition, a process by which the deconstruction of such oppositions may be effected. This cross-pollination is similar to the one Julia Kristeva alluded to above; that is, if the foreigner is within the subject, if the subject is a foreigner (1991 [1989]: 191), the dichotomy between subject and foreigner, or self and other, is totally meaningless, by which the binaries which attempt to preserve such a dichotomy irremediably collapse.

In their search for complete meaning, metaphysical systems of belief look for the transcendental signifier which would hopefully set all definitions into locked security, into Truth. The idea of God for Christianity or natural laws for

science would provide such a security; however, meaning is also beyond these systems, in so far as, as poststructuralism claims, it is not caused by language.⁸ Therefore, “[i]f meanings are not given or guaranteed, ... it follows that they can be challenged and changed” (Belsey 2002: 87). For those who find solace in the belief that Truth exists, and therefore ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ can be discerned and applied to attitudes and modes of being, this idea might prove depressing. The thought that meaning is nothing stable, by which new meanings are constantly being produced; indeed, the idea that everything is ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ at one and the same time, provides refreshing possibilities of transformation for those subjects who understand and accept their discursive nature. In other words, once we do away with the Free Subject of the West, subjects become more free.

The primary mode of expression of the subject, which I take to be narrative, is also susceptible to the idea of undecidability, as argued by Catherine Belsey:

A text might be seen as a delicate ensemble of signifying practices which bears witness to the undecidability, the polyphony, the heterogeneity of meaning at a specific historical moment. That heterogeneity is the evidence that the signified is always unstable, subject to change. (1994: 13-14)

As manifestations of a subjectivity the main characteristic of which is its refusal to be fixed, narratives are likewise open to a multiplicity of unstable (re)interpretations, as many as a text may cater for. Belsey is here arguing for a reading which is seductive, in so far as it values openness, dialogue and multiplicity. The multiplicity of the reader, that of the author, that of the text

itself, may all converge to propose open-ended readings and interpretations, thus dissolving any absolutist idea that one reading is more accurate, above the others or, simply, better. The present study is based on this idea of multiplicity which extends beyond the characters of a text to include the text itself, its author, its reader, and the writer of this study.

Part II: Desire

“[E]t ses pansers est de tel guise
que lui meïsmes en oblie,
ne set s’il est, ou s’il n’est mie,
ne ne li manbrè de son nom,
ne set s’il est armez ou non,
ne set ou va, ne set d’on vient”

—Mario Roques (ed.), *Les Romans de Chrétien de Troyes, III, Le chevalier de la charrete*, 714-719⁹

“Desire is what is not said, what cannot be said” —Catherine Belsey, *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture*, 76

“‘But I live on the land, not in the water [...] You need not be shy. Here I am. Look at my face ...’ But the shepherd, Narcissus, declined her offer. ‘It isn’t you I want,’ he answered politely, ‘only your image’” —Suniti Namjoshi, “The Disinterested Lover,” in *Feminist Fables*, 113

Sir Lancelot, in *Le chevalier de la charrete* (1958), is a victim of desire. His (adulterous) love for Queen Guinevere affects him in such a way that makes him forget himself —“lui meïsmes en oblie” (l. 715)— to the point that he is unsure of his own existence —“ne set s’il est, ou s’il n’est mie” (l. 716). He forgets his own name —“ne ne li manbre de son nom” (l. 717)—, whether he is armed —“ne set s’il est armez ou non” (l. 718)— or, even, where he is going or where he comes from — “ne set ou va, ne set d’on vient” (l. 719). Through the quasi-magical operations of desire and seduction, Lancelot is suddenly propelled

into a kind of limbo, a no-man’s-land where he ceases to be himself through the progressive loss of name, armour, and direction. Desire takes Lancelot to a pre-discursive, nameless state where his subjectivity as a knight of the Round Table can be effectively dismantled, deconstructed. The main question is why.

Catherine Belsey’s definition of desire might cast some light on the situation Lancelot finds himself in. In *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture*, Belsey describes desire as:

a kind of madness, an enchantment, exaltation, anguish ... perhaps the foundation of a lifetime of happiness. [...] The commonest and yet the most singular condition we know. At once shared with a whole culture, but intimate and personal, hopelessly banal and yet unique.

(1994: 3)

Belsey’s definition is intoxicated by the exhilarating essence of desire —“a madness, and enchantment” (1994: 3)—, permeating it with its inherent contradictions. Providing a definition of desire may be ludicrous but it is also amusing. It allows us to participate in the futile challenge of naming “what remains unspoken in the utterance” and, therefore, “has no settled place to be” (Belsey 1994: 5). Belsey’s study is just an instance in a long list of texts about desire, countless pages attempting to articulate what cannot be named within culture.¹⁰ When writing about desire, there is always something which remains elusive, something which is, possibly, what propels the compulsion to continue writing about it: “[d]esire eludes final definition,” Belsey argues, “with the result that its character, its nature, its meaning, becomes itself an object of desire for the writer” (1994: 3). It is possible that the main object of desire may be desire itself.

The resistance of desire to be defined within the rational apparatus of language mimics the effect of desire on the subject, at least on the subject Lancelot above, who forgets his name, his sense of security and direction, and becomes lost in the feeling of rapture which his overflowing desire provokes. The political implications of such a feeling should not be dismissed; after all, once Lancelot becomes nameless and therefore status-less through the effects of desire, it is presumed that an alternative location where his romance with Guinevere can be carried out might be produced, but that is another story.

If one thing remains certain about Lancelot's desire, it is that it is not repressed. Contrary to what is traditionally believed, and following Foucault, "one should not think that desire is repressed, for the simple reason that the law is what constitutes both desire and the lack on which it is predicated" (1990 [1976]: 81). Therefore, desire may be explored "behind the back of the Enlightenment ... not in secret, but in a region which can remain unacknowledged in the hard, rational, analytical world" (Belsey 1994: 11). For Lancelot, this region could probably be envisaged away from Camelot; for others, narrative fiction remains the supreme location to explore and articulate desire, and psychoanalysis stands as the theory to address the question of desire while leaving its truth "radically in question" (Belsey 1994: 42).

The two narratives which are the object of this study are proposed as examples of locations where the desire of the protagonists can be inscribed and articulated. Marianne, in Angela Carter's *Heroes and Villains* (1969), imagines a brave new world where her projection of desire can be effected in the figure of the outlandish demon lover, Jewel. Jeanette, the protagonist of Jeanette Winterson's

Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit (1985) busies herself with daily reveries from a grim reality by constructing an alternative location of fantasy and fairy tale where her desire is not just articulated, but celebrated. The two texts explore the repercussions that the inscription of desire has on the subjectivity of the protagonists. The two texts leave the truth of desire “radically in question” (Belsey 1994: 42) by refusing to reach conclusions as to the presumed final effects that the exploration of desire might have on the subject. The lack of closure of the two texts, their “undecidability” (Belsey 1994: 14), is what, in turn, sustains the desire of the reader.

The speechlessness of desire is caused, according to Lacan, by its location in the unconscious and its relation to a lack. A perpetual metonym, desire can only be articulated through the substitutions and permutations by which the unconscious is organised, but it can never be made completely present. The presence/absence of desire is articulated through the intricate process inaugurated by seduction:

Desire is that which is manifested in the interval that demand hollows within itself, in as much as the subject, in articulating the signifying chain, brings to light the want-to-be, together with the appeal to receive the complement from the Other, if the Other the locus of speech, is also the locus of want, or lack.

That which is thus given to the Other to fill, and which is strictly that which it does not have, since it, too, lacks being, is what is called love, but it is also hate and ignorance. (Lacan 1977: 263)

Seduction is traditionally believed to involve two parts: the seducer and the seducee, the demand of the subject and the projection of its desire, the Other to which the subject fastens its desire in order to futilely try to heal the rift provoked by the lost real. The subject fruitlessly tries to give the Other something to fill, something which the Other does not have “since, it, too, lacks being” (Lacan 1977: 263). The subject, however, is caught in a projection of itself in the Other, a seductive position in so far as it is “a position of control of desire, power and meaning” (Weedon 1994 [1987]: 51). The identification, then, is related to the subject’s attempt to become the source of meaning and power. But this is futile: nobody can occupy the position of the Other, because the subject is the effect of language, not its source (Weedon 1994 [1987]: 53).

The initial seduction from which our precarious subjectivity is constructed is not the secondary seduction of the Other, but the recognition of the seductive Lacanian *Gestalt* in the mirror into which the conscious child looks, that which originates “a lack of being” (Lacan 1977: 166). Hence, the initial seduction, the one which inaugurates all subsequent quests for the Other of desire, is the seduction of an image and, as such, essentially narcissistic.

At a certain point within Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1816), the organism created by Victor Frankenstein stares into a reflective pool of water. In this intertextual allusion to Eve in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667: Book IV), the creature discovers a hideous image and, although he wishes it was not his own, he becomes uncannily seduced by his own grotesqueness. The episode inaugurates the way in which the ‘monster’ becomes suddenly aware of his unique existence and, although he is appalled by his hideousness, it also opens the

possibility that alternative ways of ‘seeing’ himself may be found. Rosemary Jackson describes the relationship between the mirror and subjectivity in *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*:

A mirror produces distance. It establishes a different space, where our notions of self undergo radical change ... By presenting images of the self in another space (both familiar and unfamiliar), the mirror provides versions of self transformed into another, become something or someone else. It ... [suggests] the instability of the ‘real’ on this side of the looking-glass. (1981: 87-88)

There are two concepts worth noting in the above quote. The first is the way in which Jackson describes the mirror, as “another space (both familiar and unfamiliar)” (1981: 87). I will return to this issue in the last section of the present chapter. The second is related to the first: within this alternative space, the subject is offered versions of itself, “becoming something or someone else” (Jackson 1981: 87-88), mutating to explore multiplicity. The split subject who gazes in the mirror is Lacanian in its full signification: “divided against itself; ‘other ... than it is’, dissatisfied —and desiring” (Belsey 2002: 57). By laying bare the multiplicity of the subject within a fantastic scenario through the metaphor of corporeal transformation, the motif of metamorphosis undertakes the description of this poststructuralist subject at a literary level.

Part III: Ambiguous Metamorphoses and Leaking Identities

“To be generative of another like itself, this is the function of every animal and plant perfect in nature...” —Aristotle, *De Animalium Generatione*, 18-23

“All things are always changing,

But nothing dies” —Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book XV, 370

““Oh my, how you change! See how you’re already neither two [beings] nor one!” —Sinners in Dante Alighieri’s *Inferno*, Book XXV in *The Divine Comedy*, ll. 68-69

In her study *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds: Ways of Telling the Self* (2002) Marina Warner starts from the premise that metamorphosis, as a concept, “runs counter to notions of unique, individual integrity of identity in the Judaeo-Christian tradition” (2004 [2002]: 2). Transformation, Warner claims, allowed Christians to distinguish good from evil, as it was considered a marker of “heterodoxy, instability, perversity, unseemingly monstrosity” (2004 [2002]: 36). It was supposed to evidence a subject which had been invaded by strangeness—a subject which had been possessed, even. It is no wonder that one of the distinguishing features of Satan is, precisely, his duplicitous nature, and he is described as “inhabit[ing] other identities,” in an attempt to fulfil his “unnameable desire to be other than he is” (Belsey 1994: 172, 173). The satanic overtones of transformation and duplicity, in turn, ignited fears about the preservation of the presumed coherence of a subject which had to show no fragmentation, no difference, no plurality in order to be considered pure.

This is probably one of the reasons that led Dante Alighieri to focus upon the issue of physical transformation when he described his *Inferno* in *The Divine Comedy* (XXV, 1958). In one of the epigraphs opening this section, Dante’s sinners are horrified when they witness a being whose protean nature is evidenced by its having not one, but two heads. Transformation, once more, entails lack of purity. Dante knew as much, hence the reason for his infernal metamorphoses

showing the “impossibility of identity perduring”, as illustrated by C. W. Bynum (2001: 185).

If anything, metamorphosis must be understood within narrative fiction as a metaphor for the perpetual mutations to which personal identity is subject. Ovid explores this idea through fifteen books in his *Metamorphoses* (1916), where his subjects, who, incidentally, mutate in moments of extreme crisis, acquire a shape which “more fully expresses them and perfects them than their first form” (Warner 2004 [2002]: 4). Ovid’s transformational model of “ambiguous metamorphosis and leaking identities” (Warner 2004 [2002]: 86) has been popularised within fiction, and its mechanisms can be seen at work in traditional stories of heroes or heroines who, after going through some difficulties and a lot of neglect, are finally rewarded with ‘true’ selfhood:

[T]he protagonist’s true self generates itself in its proper character after undergoing several transformations; the larger transformation of their circumstances and the appearance of the person’s fullness of being unfolded through several smaller transformations [...] at the end to reveal the proven and tested protagonist, restored to his appropriate outer form, but also radically transformed by his ordeal (Warner 2004 [2002]: 85)

The above transformational model, which bears striking similarities with the popular genre of the *Bildungsroman*, is based on the premise that there is a “true self” and a “proper character” (Warner 2004 [2002]: 85) to be achieved at the end of the narrative, and that these are related to an “appropriate outer form” (Warner 2004 [2002]: 85), a corporeality which defines personality and restores it once the

'original' body form is recovered, even if metamorphosis has "radically transformed" a presumed psychic reality (Warner 2004 [2002]: 85). It is almost as if the story of Lucius, the man who is transformed into an ass in Apuleius's *The Golden Ass* (1950), is repeated over and over again. Once he reaches the antidote in the shape of a bunch of roses, Lucius is allowed to go back to his 'original', anthropomorphic corporeality. His life as an ass, however, profoundly marks his personality and, even though he is 'back to normal', he has become, if anything, an improved Lucius. The dichotomy between the body and the psyche, although maintained in these narratives, is evidenced to be fragile, and it follows the Lacanian model of identification with a *Gestalt* that constitutes "mental permanence" (Lacan 1977: 3).

Metamorphosis, therefore, is a key fictional tool which explores and assesses concepts of the self in relation to itself. It opens debates about whether the presumed stability of the self may be maintained through permanent corporeal shape, whilst proposing a scenario where corporeal permanence might be potentially upset, thus examining the consequences that an ambiguous state may have on the self's presumed psychic solidity. Tales about selves becoming unrecognisable to themselves can only happen in transitional and equally ambiguous scenarios, which Warner has referred to as: "crossroads, cross-cultural zones, points of interchange" (2004 [2002]: 17), which allow a defining dynamic of certain kinds of stories, such as fairy tales, for instance, of which transformation is a distinguishing feature.¹¹ As Warner suggests, these kind of stories exert a particular fascination on readers in so far as they "promise us change, too" (Warner 2004 [2002]: 19) by allowing us to move freely within a

fantastic, alternative location. Metamorphic tales allow characters and readers to inhabit spaces where the endless desire of the subject to transform, what Lacan calls “the want-to-be” (1977: 263), is given priority. In metamorphic tales, all subjects are allowed to play Zeus, the pagan god who used disguise and transformation in order to explore his licentious desire to seduce nymphs, goddesses and mortals alike. Metamorphosis, therefore, creates a utopian state of affairs where the desire to escape the bounds of the (social) self may be articulated, where the self may become polymorphous, where the paradoxes of identity may be explored or, even, where the poststructuralist subject may find a means of expression:

The history of changes in the manifestations and meanings of metamorphic myths can throw some light on the phenomenon’s continuing vitality, in the search for personal identity and the indestructible pleasure of making up—and reading—stories. (Warner 2004 [2002]: 28)

One of the interesting changes which metamorphic myths have recently undergone has been proposed by the work of Donna Haraway. In “A Manifesto for Cyborgs,” included in her volume *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (1991), Haraway sketches a creature which is half organic and half machine and, as such, stands on the threshold between nature and culture. Haraway’s cyborg deconstructs, in the writer’s words, “the mundane fiction of Man and Woman” (1991: 180) whilst nonchalantly walking the dichotomous edge between reality and fiction, being a creature of both (Haraway 1991: 146). The theory of the cyborg is interesting for several reasons. On the one hand, its

transformational model entirely obliterates the notion of an 'original' form to be recovered, as there is no 'original' corporeality which has been lost in this case. On the other, it brings to light the concept of hybridity. The metamorphic myth is based on the idea of 'becoming', by which a final result of the transformation may be envisaged at the end of the tale. The cyborg, however, remains in an interspace between one form and the next, in an ambiguity which unauthorises any labelling of such a creature, hence Haraway's presentation of it as potentially political: the "cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work," she claims (1991: 152). One of the most potent political implications of such a myth might be its status as "a kind of disassembled and reassembled, post-modern collective and personal self" (1991: 163).

The metamorphosis of the main character into something other than she was initially is one of the issues informing my reading of both *Heroes and Villains* and *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*. In Angela Carter's novel, Marianne's identity, initially bestowed on her by her heritage as a Professor girl, undergoes a process of deconstruction when she is suddenly propelled into the exotic, outlandish imaginary of Barbarian land with her future lover, the savage Jewel. Among the Barbarians, Marianne has to endure the ordeal of living in a community who believe she is a witch, with children and elders creeping away from her. Later, she is mythified into several mytho-poetic roles, such as Miranda, in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (c. 1610), or the biblical Eve. When she is forced to marry Jewel, she is, once more, secularised by becoming the wife of the Barbarian and the future mother of his child. One by one, all the subject positions cast upon

the figure of Marianne, from Professor girl to Barbarian wife and mother, are rebuffed by her refusal to reconcile with an image of herself imposed by alien agents. Her ultimate metamorphosis into the tiger lady is chosen by herself, although the novel's open-endedness questions whether it will indeed be the last one. Marianne, a subject in constant process, is propelled into a potentially liberating but uncertain future, as uncertain as the gender of her child, which the novel refuses to disclose.

Jeanette, on the other hand, initiates her tale from a fiercely realistic perspective, in a northern, working-class industrial town and as a child adopted by Christian evangelists. The difficult relationship she has with her totalitarian mother ignites the power of fantasy in the young girl, who recalls intricate events from her past through the use of the fairy-tale mode. When she reaches adolescence and discovers her lesbian desire, a desire for which, incidentally, she does not find a name, the need to create alternative, positive versions of herself becomes, if anything, a question of survival. Little by little, Jeanette becomes increasingly comfortable in a fantastic world created by her desire to explore her desires, her fears and her innermost wishes. At the same time, it proves a world where she can mutate into fairy-tale beings, characters from the Bible, questing knights, and all sorts of (per)versions of herself which allow her to explore her uncanny, yet welcome, strangeness and to discover the liberating implications of fantasy.

The two novels, in their interest to theorise desire, propose a view of subjectivity which celebrates multiplicity, unconcerned by social constraints in an alternative, utopian dimension which the desire of the characters has the power to

create. Both Marianne and Jeanette are active participants in the creation of their utopian fantasy, and both are described as subjects-in-process, hybrids constantly moving on to their next ambiguous metamorphosis:

Metamorphosis as divine fantasy, as vital principle of nature, as punishment, as reprieve, as miracle, as cultural dynamic, as effect of historical meetings and clashes, as the difference that lures, as the lost idyll, as time out of time, as a producer of stories and meanings ...

(Warner 2004 [2002]: 74)

Part IV: Literary Seductions

“A veces en la tarde una cara
nos mira desde el fondo de un espejo;
el arte debe ser como ese espejo
que nos revela nuestra propia cara”
—Jorge Luís Borges, “Arte Poetica”, ll. 20-25

“A story is always a question of desire” —Teresa de Lauretis, “Desire in Narrative,” in *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, 112

“What I seek in speech is the response of the Other. What constitutes me as a Subject is my question” —Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, 86

“The pleasure of the text is ... an Oedipal pleasure” —Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 10

Marina Warner identifies three processes governing the concept of metamorphosis: hatching, splitting, and the result of splitting, doubling. Doubles in all their configurations, whether *doppelgängers* or alter egos, haunt all fiction, they are not the prerogative of horror stories (Warner 2004 [2002]: 27). This pervasiveness of the double in fiction proves that a paradigm act of doubling is, precisely, representation itself.

In previous sections of the present chapter, Rosemary Jackson was quoted describing the mirror as an agent which “establishes a different space, where our notions of self undergo radical change” (1981: 87-88). The mirror provides versions of the self becoming other “in another space (both familiar and unfamiliar)” (1981: 87-88), thus suggesting “the instability of the ‘real’ on this side of the looking-glass” (1981: 87-88). I would like to propound here that Jackson’s description of the mirror as an alternative space, both familiar and unfamiliar, where equally alternative versions of the self may be produced, thus suggesting the instability of reality, may be regarded as a metaphor for narrative fiction.

The mirror, like literature, provides the results of representation. In the mirror, the self becomes doubled, as doubled as Narcissus, Frankenstein’s creature, or the reader of fiction, all catching fleeting glimpses of their multiplicity, while becoming seduced by an image of themselves—a (per)version—in an endless repetition of the Lacanian *stade du miroir*.¹² In turn, their glimpses of multiplicity allow them to problematise the nature of ‘reality’ or whether what is happening “on this side of the looking-glass” (Jackson 1981: 88) is more ‘real’ than their (fictional) projection.

“Text,” Marina Warner argues, “brings impossible things into existence in the mutual exchange between readers’ and writers’ fantasy” (2004 [2002]: 169). This proves the power of stories as “a way of imagining alternatives, mapping possibilities, exciting hope” (Warner 2004 [2002]: 212). Narrative fiction is the utopian space where desire can be explored, and this is possible in so far as narrative and desire are ruled by the same mechanisms: “[a] story is always a

question of desire,” claims Teresa de Lauretis (1984: 112).¹³ Narrative fiction is a crossroad, a point of interchange, the transitional space which functions like a mirror allowing subjects to theorise their subjectivity through reflection. Narrative fiction constitutes a strange world which is real and not real at the same time, a hybrid space which offers (imagined) versions of ourselves.

The act of writing itself, as described by Catherine Belsey, is also narcissistic to a degree:

[A]t its most elementary level [writing is] a quest for recognition, the place where the subject appears. But it is also an attempt to reach beyond the demand, to transgress the ordinary processes of the symbolic or to suspend its prohibitions. And in this sense writing is where, paradoxically, the subject *disappears* [...] Nowhere is it more apparent that subjectivity inhabits the field of the Other than in the effort to write something difficult, to formulate an idea which remains either stubbornly elusive or drearily familiar. (1994: 19, italics in original)

Belsey’s description of the act of writing echoes Jackson’s portrayal of the mirror above, “the place where the subject appears” in recognition (Belsey 1994: 19) but, paradoxically, also the place where the subject disappears, becoming multiple in its attempt to “transgress the ordinary processes of the symbolic or to suspend its prohibitions” (Belsey 1994: 19). A work of narrative is a place where the subject can engage itself with meaning, desire, and the desire to produce meaning, to “[articulate] the signifying chain” (Lacan 1977: 263). A story is a place where the subject, following Humpty Dumpty’s initial proposal, can play at being ‘Master’,

however temporarily. Just as stories produce subjects, the narrative transaction engages the subject with the Other: “[w]hat I seek in speech is the response of the Other. What constitutes me as a Subject is my question,” Lacan argues (1977: 86). Narrative is the dialogic interaction which prompts questions and potential responses, in an endless impetus to communicate, to reach out to the Other.

The desire to originate meaning, the “appeal to receive the complement from the Other” (Lacan 1977: 263) through the articulation of the signifying chain, demonstrates how narrative shares the same mechanisms of desire. When attempting to answer the question as to whether desire is a matter of fact or fiction, Catherine Belsey realises that its categorical citationality roots desire “in texts, and above all in fiction” (1994: 82). Desire, like stories, can be found everywhere in Western culture, possibly because:

Stories are about desire [...] They also seek to elicit the desire of the reader, if only the desire for a closure that is finally withheld. [...] Conversely, desire transforms our own lives into narratives full of uncertainty, suspense and challenges. In its citationality, it turns us all into protagonists, heroic or legendary; it turns our objects of desire into figures from fiction, whether folktale or romance. (Belsey 1994: 208)

The desire to produce and receive narrative, to metamorphose ourselves into protagonists and our objects of desire into figures or romance, is not just ubiquitous, it is also a desire which can never be satisfied, for desire is perpetually deferred.

Satisfaction would imply putting an end to the narrative interchange whilst establishing a boundary around it, delimiting the narrative to encapsulate it in a sudden termination of the stimulus to move forward. If narrative exchange, with its questions and potential responses, constitutes subjectivity, as argued by Lacan above, the insatiability of the desire to produce and receive narratives, to question and answer, ensures that there is no possible death to the narrating impulse. Even if silence is the answer, there will always be a subject who will desire to produce or receive a narrative: “You don’t tell a story only to yourself. There is always someone else. Even when there is no one,” claims the handmaid in Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985: 49).

On the other hand, the appeal to the Other through the act of narration is likewise insatiable in so far as a story is never completely told, there are multiple (per)versions waiting to be narrated. Again, the point is lyrically made by Atwood’s handmaid:

It’s impossible to say a thing exactly the way it was, because what you say can never be exact, you always have to leave something out, there are too many parts, sides, crosscurrents, nuances; too many gestures, which could mean this or that, too many shapes which can never be fully described, too many flavours, in the air or on the tongue, half-colours too many. (1985: 144)

In every story there is material which escapes definition —“what you say can never be exact, you always have to leave something out” (Atwood 1985: 144). In every story, there is always something elusive which has no settled place —“half-colours too many” (Atwood 1985: 144). The futile attempt to offer the whole

story, to communicate it to the Other, to involve oneself in the endless signifying chain, is possibly what prompts the subject to keep on narrating, in an attempt to articulate what is inarticulable, in an attempt to discover the truth of desire.

Stories are seductive to the reader in so far as they create an alternative location where the multiple subject that he/she is can be fully explored. They are seductive because they offer a specular space where the subject can appear and disappear. They are seductive because they share in the mechanisms of the desire for the Other which governs the creation of subjectivity itself. They are seductive because they allow for a location where this desire can be temporarily articulated, where metamorphosis and transformation are idiosyncratic and natural. They are seductive because they are never-ending, because we will never stop telling our story. One of the main achievements of humanity is its literary seductions.

Notes

¹ Poststructuralism is not merely a linguistic theory, as will be argued later on. It integrates issues of language, subjectivity, social organisation and power. A number of theoretical propositions have contributed to its constitution. For an extensive overview of these, see chapter 2, “Principles of Poststructuralism,” in Chris Weedon’s *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (1987), pp. 12–42. For full publication details see the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

² I am indebted to Professor Chris Weedon for pointing out to me that the terms ‘subjectivity’ and ‘identity’ are not completely interchangeable. Throughout this study, my proposal will be that subjectivity is composed of a number of identities which may be in conflict with each other; hence the precariousness which defines the term within the poststructuralist economy. Catherine Belsey has busied herself with a differentiation between these two terms, which may cast light on my discussion here: “[The use of the term] ‘Subject’ can be more precise than ‘identity’ as a way of thinking about the issues. First, as a grammatical term, it places the emphasis squarely on the language we learn from birth, and from which we internalize the meanings, including the meanings of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ our culture expects us to live by. Second, it builds on the ambiguity of the grammatical term itself: I am free to say and do what I like to the degree that I accept a certain subjection to those cultural norms. And third, it allows for discontinuities and contradictions. I can adopt a range of subject-positions, and not all of them will necessarily be consistent with each other. ‘Identity’ implies sameness: that’s what the word means. Subjects can differ—even from themselves” (2002: 52).

³ For an interesting discussion on this issue, see Charles Taylor’s *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (1997). Full publication details of this text can be found under the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

⁴ Although *The Interpretation of Dreams*, where Freud develops his theory about the unconscious was published in 1900, psychoanalysis began much earlier, in the 1880s. Initially trained as a neuroscientist at the University of Vienna, Freud devoted his early work to medical issues related to motor paralyses. In these, he included early approaches to hypnotism and its potential cure for hysteria. It was only when he moved to Paris and started working at the La Salpêtrière Clinic that Freud came into contact with his colleague Jean Martin Charcot, and his research underwent the radical change which would take him to theorise the unconscious (Bristow 1997: 63–64).

⁵ Mine is one of the multiple ways in which Lacanian theory can be read. I have used Lacanian psychoanalysis here to theorise the multiplicity of identity, which conforms a split subjectivity, thus giving way to the poststructuralist notion of the discoherent subject in process. I am aware that my discussion on Lacan is not marked by gender, and no specificity has been made with regard to the way in which both Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan theorised the female subject. Although there is some debate about the theorisation of the female subject in psychoanalysis in subsequent sections of this study, I would like to make a brief reference to some useful compilations and readings of psychoanalysis from a feminist perspective. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose edited *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne* in 1982. This reference book contains most of the Lacanian writings on women. Rosalind Minsky’s *Psychoanalysis and Gender: An Introductory Reader* (1996) is quite extensive and contains material from Freud, Lacan, Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva, among others. Shelley Saguaro’s *Psychoanalysis and Woman* (2000) is an excellent compilation of texts by Freud, Klein, Jung, Lacan, and what Saguaro terms “Postmodernisms/Postfeminisms”. Although not exclusively based on female sexuality, Joseph Bristow’s *Sexuality* (1997) offers a thorough guide to this topic, with clarifying explanations on Lacanian theory. For a theorisation of the lesbian subject, see the compilation of psychoanalytic literature on this subject by Noreen O’Connor and Joanna Ryan entitled *Wild Desires & Mistaken Identities: Lesbianism and Psychoanalysis* (1993). See the **Works Cited** section for full bibliographical information.

⁶ Due to its interest in doing away with the Cartesian notion of the subject, which is, as has been argued, perceptibly androcentric, poststructuralism has seduced a number of feminist scholars, critics, and readers, among which I count myself. The potential creation of arenas where ‘other’ subjects may find means of expression and representation is one of the refreshing attributes of poststructuralism and, although it would be impossible to provide an inclusive list of all the texts which have theorised a potential integration of feminism and poststructuralism, reference must be made here to Chris Weedon’s groundbreaking study *Feminist Practise and Poststructuralist Theory*, which was first published in 1987, and which informs the present chapter. In her 1997 revision of the text, Weedon included an additional chapter on “Feminism and Postmodernism” (pp. 170-185). Linda Hutcheon’s equally groundbreaking studies *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) and *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989) must also be mentioned here. Linda J. Nicholson’s *Feminism/Postmodernism*, edited in 1990, includes interesting chapters on the integration of these two theories, as does *Feminism & Postmodernism*, edited by

Margaret Ferguson and Jennifer Wicke in 1994. Laura Kipnis's "Feminism: The Political Conscience of Postmodernism?" is included in Andrew Ross's *Universal Abandon? The Politics of Postmodernism* (1988, pp. 149-166), the volume *Postmodern Culture*, edited by Hal Foster in 1983 includes "The Discourse of Others: Feminism and Postmodernism," by Craig Owens (pp. 57-82). Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) is an excellent theoretical account on the subject of sex, gender and desire. More concerned with fictional texts, but still using feminist poststructuralism as its theoretical framework, are the works by Patricia Waugh, *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern* (1989); Paulina Palmer, *Contemporary Women's Fiction: Narrative Practice and Feminist Theory* (1989); Sally Robinson, *Engendering the Subject: Gender and Self-Representation in Contemporary Women's Fiction* (1991); and Magali Cornier Michael, *Feminism and the Postmodern Impulse: Post-World War II Fiction* (1996). The Spanish collection *Abanicos Excéntricos: ensayos sobre la mujer en la cultura postmoderna*, edited by M^a Carmen África Vidal and Teresa Gómez Reus in 1995, contains a state of the art on the question of feminism and postmodernism entitled "Feminismo/Postmodernismo: sobre el estado de la cuestión," written by the editors (pp. 11-20). For full bibliographical details of all the above, see the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

⁷ Sara Mills's *Discourse* (1997) offers excellent insights into Foucault's theory of discourse. Linda J. Nicholson's volume *Feminism/Postmodernism* (1990) includes a discussion on Foucault in relation to feminism in chapter 7, "Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?" by Nancy Hartsock (pp. 157-172). See the **Works Cited** section of the present study for full bibliographical details.

⁸ Jacques Lacan theorises the transcendental signifier in a paper which was first presented in 1958 at the Max Planck Institute in Munich, and which he thereafter published in his *Écrits* in 1966. The title of the paper, "The Meaning of the Phallus", omits no clues as to the psychoanalyst's choice for a transcendental signifier within the Symbolic order. The phallus, Lacan's most controversial theoretical concept, creates a dialectic of desire by structuring the relations between the sexes around 'being' the phallus and 'having' the phallus. As a transcendental signifier, however, access to it is denied to all subjects within the symbolic, by which it should not, according to Lacan, be identified with the penis (Lacan 1977: 287-288).

⁹ "[A]nd his thoughts are such that he forgets himself, that he does not know whether he exists or not, does not remember his name, whether or not he is armed, where he is going or where he comes from." Translated by Catherine Belsey in *Desire: Love Stories in*

Western Culture (1994: 101). For full publication details of Belsey's text, see the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

¹⁰ When I refer to the existence of a long list of texts about desire, I do not simply mean those which address the issue openly, such as the collection edited by Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson entitled *Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (1983); Rosalind Coward's *Female Desire: Women's Sexuality Today* (1984); Mary Anne Doane's *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (1988); or Catherine Belsey's *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture* (1994). As will be argued later, my belief is that all stories are related to desire and that, therefore, desire is present/absent in all forms of fiction. Hence, to draw a list here would be an impossible task. For full bibliographical details of the texts, see the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

¹¹ Vladimir Propp's seminal study *Transformacii valshébnij shazok* is concerned with a theory of the mechanisms of transformation in fantastic tales; and it was first published in the journal *Poétika, Vremennik Otdela Slavesnij Iskusstv, IV* in 1928. It was later translated into French by Tzvetán Todorov so as to be included in the volume dedicated to Russian Formalists, *Théorie de la littérature* in 1966. The English translation of the text, *Morphology of the Folk Tale*, dates from 1968 and it was carried out by L. Scott. See the **Works Cited** section of the present study for full bibliographical information.

¹² I would like to emphasise that what I am describing here is by no means a simplistic identification of the reader with the hero or heroine of a story. Rather, the reader of fiction is seduced by the text in so far as it provides a recognition of his/her status as a multiple, *discoherent* subject. The fact that narrative, as will be argued, shares in the same mechanisms of desire, allows for this seduction to work at an unconscious level.

¹³ De Lauretis is not the only theorist who is interested in the issue of desire and its potential links with narrative. See, for example, *S/Z*, by Roland Barthes, which was translated into English in 1974. A year later, another text by Barthes concentrating on desire and narrative was also translated, under the title *The Pleasure of the Text*. Julia Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974) also provides a theoretical basis to the issue, as does the collection edited by Leon S. Roudiez *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (1980). The article "Narrative Desire," by Peter Brooks was published in the journal *Style* in 1984 and it also contains interesting insights on this matter. The same could be said about another article, "Narrative and Theories of Desire," by J. Clayton, published in *Critical Inquiry* in 1989. For full publication details of all these texts, see the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

Literary Reflections

III. Literary Reflections I: Angela Carter, *Heroes and Villains* (1969)

1. "Dreaming Frankenstein," Liz Lochhead

She said she
woke up with him in
her head, in her bed.
Her mother-tongue clung to her mouth's roof
in terror, dumbing her, and he came with a name
that was none of her making.

Later, stark staring awake to everything
(the room, the dark parquet, the white high Alps beyond)
all normal in the moonlight
and him gone, save a ton-weight sensation,
the marks fading visibly where
his buttons had bit into her and
the rough serge of his suiting had chafed her sex,
she knew —oh that was not how—
but he'd entered her utterly.

This was the penetration
of seven swallowed apple pips.
Or else he'd slipped like a silver dagger
between her ribs and healed her up secretly
again. Anyway
he was inside her
and getting him out again
would be agony fit to quarter her,
unstitching everything.

Eyes on those high peaks
in the reasonable sun of the morning,
she dressed in damp muslin
and sat down to quill and ink
and icy paper.

In her poem “Dreaming Frankenstein”, Scottish writer Liz Lochhead is proposing a narrative which shares extraordinarily similar elements with the one Angela Carter presents in *Heroes and Villains*, the novel which will be examined in the second part of the present study. Lochhead’s source of inspiration is found in the myth of Frankenstein—alluded to already in the title of the poem—which serves the author to fantasise about the way in which the idea for the novel was born in Mary Shelley’s imagination; in other words, she describes how Shelley effectively “dreamt” of Frankenstein, how she conceived her story. Lochhead’s re-deployment of this literary myth takes her to grounds which are akin to those Carter explores in her own text.

The poem revolves around a birth, which is narrated in indirect speech by an unnamed female creator, whom the title directs the reader to identify with Mary Shelley. The first lines of the poem —“She said she/woke up with him in/her head, in her bed,” (ll. 1-3)— and their representation of the act of giving birth are ambiguous, in so far as they allude to the as yet unknown creature occupying the bed of the woman, thus articulating a sub-text of eroticism. At the same time, the lines propose a further ambiguity by referring to the creature as being “in her head” (l. 3). At this stage of the poem, the creation which the text alludes to might be understood in a twofold way; namely, biological and literary: it is possible that the creature is, in fact, present in the woman’s bed, but at the same time it could merely be an invention in the head of the woman involved in the act of creation. The “terror” (l. 5) of conception paradoxically makes her unable to articulate, it “dumb[s] her” (l. 5). The creature which has been born from her is deemed autonomous, for it comes to the world with an already-forged

identity, “with a name that was none of her making” (l. 6). Therefore, at one and the same time, her creation issues from her, but it is projected outside her self, becoming an independent entity.

The lines which follow make reference to her behaviour once she has awoken from what, at a realistic level, might simply be described as a dream. She stares at everything around her which seems “all normal in the moonlight” (l. 9); in effect, it was only a nightmare, and reality reinforces itself once a state of consciousness is recovered. The creature that caused her upsetting hallucination seems to be gone, but he is not. He has impregnated her, which leaves in the woman “a ton-weight sensation” (l. 10), in clear evidence that “he’d entered her utterly” (l. 15). In his nocturnal invasion of her, which is compared to the “penetration/of seven swallowed apple pips” (ll. 16-17), the creature has effectively “healed her up secretly” (l. 19), by which it will be “agony” (l. 23) to “[get] him out again” (l. 22) and will probably end up “unstitching everything” (l. 24) in the process.

On the one hand, the motifs which Lochhead is using in these lines clearly connect to the imagery of birth which the poem revolves around, by which her choice of medical vocabulary —heal, stitch (ll. 19, 24)— are an attempt on the part of the author that the reader constructs in his/her mind the perception of giving birth together with its ensuing medical procedures. On the other hand, the lines can also be read according to the alternative reading that the text itself accommodates; namely, that of literary creation. The seed of inspiration —“apple pips” (l. 17)— has effectively been planted in the woman’s imagination, the actual enterprise of writing him —“[get] him out again” (l. 22)— will, undoubtedly, be a

difficult enterprise —an “agony” (l.23)—, and in this process, her own identity will be transformed —he will be “unstitching everything” (l. 24).

The last verse of the poem proposes an interesting resolution to the narrative in so far as it offers the resolution of what this birth, this inspiration, will finally turn into. The female protagonist of the poem gets dressed “in damp muslin” (l. 27), and sits down “to quill and ink/and icy paper” (ll. 28-29), in order to metamorphose what the reader now fully identifies as a fantasy of creation into genuine literary creation. In these final lines, therefore, the reading of the poem which proposes the origin of a literary creation is ultimately upheld.

Lochhead’s fantasy of how Frankenstein was inspired in Mary Shelley’s imagination, of how she dreamt of him and created the story, is relevant here in so far as it deploys motifs and topics which are anticipated in Angela Carter’s *Heroes and Villains*, and which my reading of this novel will particularly emphasise. In its restless exploration of the act of literary creation, the poem discusses the related topics of desire and identity, thus creating a map of intricate relations amongst all these issues at work.

Creation, whether literary or otherwise, is in close relation to desire. For a start, Lochhead’s poem opens the debate on the desire to create. On a twist of the same logic, desire is also seen to inspire creation. The opening of Lochhead’s text offers an eroticised vocabulary and setting, so that the arena of desire is effectively created. From this, the author aligns erotic desire with the desire to create in the female protagonist. Coherently, this takes place outside the woman’s reasoning, who dreams of her creation, for desire can only be articulated beyond the boundaries of the conscious mind. Her desire to create, therefore, finds

impersonation in the creature which seems to be autonomous of her, with an identity of his own, but who is throughout a figment of her potent imagination. Thus she projects her desire —to (pro)create— outside, shaping it into the unknown creature, the monster which is a product of the dream of her reason. It is not until the final verses of the poem that Lochhead connects the woman's desire with her own identity in pointing out how, in the act of creation, she will be transformed, metamorphosed —probably into a writer, if not a mother, in metaphorical terms: in 'mothering' the creature, she writes its story or, even, when she writes its story, she mothers the creature in a process which has implications on herself. Hence, desire, (narrative) creation, and subjectivity are linked in the intricate thread of references that Lochhead's poem subtly proposes.

In the following sections of this study, Angela Carter's novel *Heroes and Villains* will be offered as an example of the delicate, yet complex, connection which is established between (erotic) desire, the projection of desire on to an outlandish, exotic figure, and the repercussions that the projection of desire may have, both on the Other and on the subject who desires. Through the creation of an outsider who encapsulates desire, as will be seen, the subject is effectively "unstitched", to use Lochhead's term; that is, inescapably metamorphosed and participating in the Otherness which has been created by herself. In its status as a production of the subject, therefore, the stranger is located within this subject, thus granting her with a subjectivity that escapes definition and coherence. The outcome of the dialogical interactions between the subject and the Other, which is initiated by the articulation that desire finds through creation, offers a multiplicity

of subject positions which, as will be argued, are conspicuously liberating and powerfully creative.

2. “Dans un pays inconnu”: Angela Carter in Con-Text

“In the beginning was ... what?” Perhaps, in the beginning, there was a curious room, crammed with wonders” —Angela Carter, “The Curious Room,” in *American Ghosts and Old World Wonders*, 13

“Be advised ... this writer is no meat-and-potatoes hack” —Salman Rushdie, introduction to *Burning Your Boats*, 2

Angela Carter’s premature death in 1992 provided her writer friends with the possibility of bespeaking —via obituaries— the spell-bind to which she would subject not only those who read her, but also all those that met the author in the flesh. Canadian writer Margaret Atwood wrote: “The amazing thing about her, for me, was that someone who looked so much like the Fairy Godmother ... should actually *be* so much like the Fairy Godmother” (Makinen 1992: 2, italics in original); J.G. Ballard and Salman Rushdie referred to her as “a friendly witch” and a “high sorceress” respectively (Makinen 1992: 2). Some years later, on a much more detached level, Paul Barker would analyse the impact that Carter’s death had on her career as a writer:

She dies untimely, and everyone suddenly bursts out weeping. The obituaries give her better notices than anything she ever received in

her lifetime. Her books sell out within three days of her death. She becomes the most read contemporary author on English university campuses. Her last story, finished during her final illness, sells 80,000 copies in paperback. She has arrived. But she is dead. (1995: 14)

Rumour has it that Gore Vidal, in his distinctly sardonic style, once said that death is the best career move for an author. Paul Barker, writing on Carter, seems to agree with him; and so do the facts and figures: three days after her death, Virago had sold out all of Carter's books (Bristow & Broughton 1997: 1), and over the 1992-93 academic year, she had already become by far the most "fashionable twentieth-century topic" for doctorate research (Sage 1994b: 3). This information is especially significant if one takes into account that Carter must have been one of the most productive characters within the English literary world. Her first novel, the highly acclaimed *Shadow Dance* (1966), was written at the age of 26.

2.1 "Tough, arrogant and pragmatic"

Born in 1940 in Eastbourne, educated in Yorkshire and South London, and with a degree in Medieval English literature at Bristol University, Carter is the author of nine novels, three collections of short stories and countless additional works such as radio plays, essays and reviews (Bristow & Broughton 1997: 1).

"A tough, arrogant and pragmatic Yorkshire child," as she described herself in her essay collection *Nothing Sacred* (1982: 4), Carter's list of influences, both English and foreign, covers amazingly wide ground. Authors such as Jonathan Swift, William Blake, Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, Lewis Carroll, Bram Stoker, the Symbolist and Dadaist artists, the cinema of Luis

Buñuel and Jean-Luc Godard, and thinkers such as Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault provided substantial and extensive inspiration for her as a writer (Bristow & Broughton 1997: 1). In her long essay, *The Sadeian Woman* (1979), she pays academic tribute to no less than the traditionally ‘dreaded’ Marquis de Sade (Sage 1994a: 2). This bizarre, yet titillating, mixture of enchantment, sexuality, seduction and academic sophistication has provided Carter with yet another deliciously extravagant label: “the high priestess of post-graduate porn” (Bristow & Broughton 1997: 1). As Salman Rushdie advises the reader in one of the quotes which open this section, Carter is “no meat-and-potatoes hack” (BB 1996: ii). Reading Angela Carter may well be like entering “a curious room, crammed with wonders” (1994: 127) or travelling to an unknown country, “un pays unconnu” (Carter 1969: epigraph page).

It is impossible to know today how the author herself would have reacted to these peculiar mythifications of her literary persona. If, as Margaret Atwood holds, “[she] was born subversive” (Sage 1994a: 1), it is to be supposed that she would have found these characterisations ludicrously funny. Carter was one for mockery, especially with regard to anything related to cultural myths, as Mar Pérez Gil argues in her extensive study on Carter’s fiction:

[e]n la obra [de Carter] se desautoriza lo autoritario, se desmitifica el Mito, se deshace lo acabado, se destruyen los límites entre lo real y lo fantástico, se desafía lo sagrado y se desplaza lo oficial para introducir lo marginal y lo subversivo. (1996: 13)

Sarah Gamble, writing on Carter a few years after Pérez Gil, draws a similar picture of her fiction when she states that “[s]he loved to upset expectations,

outrage convention and challenge preconceptions, which meant that the only thing she could be relied upon to do was the unexpected” (Gamble 1997: 2). The “unexpected” seems to have become the norm in Carter’s career, especially in her interest in relation to deconstructing myths, challenging what is traditionally believed to be sacred and creating an arena for the subversive and marginal.

The above are some of the characteristics that the reader will find embedded in the re-writings of traditional fairy tales that Carter offers in her collection *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979), where extraordinarily sensual and curious retellings of “Beauty and the Beast” and “Little Red Riding Hood”, can be enjoyed, together with others.¹ The fairy tale is a sub-genre that Carter had already deployed in some of her earlier novels, such as *The Magic Toyshop* (John Lewellyn Rhys Prize, 1967) and *Heroes and Villains* (1969) —of which more later. Her revising eye had also turned to the sub-genre of science-fiction, which she first used in *Heroes and Villains*, and later explored to further depths in the picaresque *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972):

The journey alone is real, not the landfall. I have no compass to guide me. I set my course by the fitfulness of fortune and perceive my random signposts only by the inextinguishable flame of my lusts.

(1982 [1972]: 123)

In *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) she scrutinises, among others, the cultural mechanisms at work in the formation of the female subject through a wildly fantastic plot that follows the development and equally wild transformation(s) of Eve/lyn, initially a male character who undergoes a surgical transformation at the

hands of a guerilla group, to finally become his own “masurbatory fantasy” (1998 [1977]: 75):

[w]hen I looked in the mirror, I saw Eve; I did not see myself. I saw a young woman who, though she was I, I could in no way acknowledge as myself, for this one was only a lyrical abstraction of femininity to me, a tinted arrangement of curved lines. [...] They had turned me into the *Playboy* center fold. I was the object of all the unfocused desires that had ever existed in my own head. I had become my own masturbatory fantasy. (1998 [1977]: 74-75)

In *Nights at the Circus* (1984) she deconstructs with *gusto* the myth by which women are culturally transformed into angelic beings.² Here, the plot is again dominated by a picaresque structure, where readers find a heroine, Fevvers, also known as the Cockney Venus, who could easily be described as one of Carter’s early heroines ‘after twenty years’. Fevvers is gifted with a sardonic eye and a sense of humour only displayed by those who have been put through the mangle and come out stronger at the other end. She also has an extraordinary pair of wings, which become essential to the promotion of her ‘freakish’ nature. But Fevvers, contrary to the initial expectations set by her phisicality, is no angel in the house:

She gave him a queer look, as if she suspected he were teasing and, sooner or later, she would remember to pay him back for it, but her mouth was too full for a ripost as she tucked into this earthiest, coarsest cabbies’ fare with gargantuan enthusiasm. She gorged, she stuffed herself, she spilled gravy on herself, she sucked up peas from

the knife; she had a gullet to match her size and table manners of the Elizabethan variety. (1994 [1984]: 22)

Carter could not, and did not, leave quietly. Her exceptional farewell to her audiences was a triple somersault in the shape of a novel the title of which is *Wise Children* (1991), her very personal homage to the great bard of English literature, William Shakespeare.³

2.2 Carter's Messages and Methods

The desire on the part of Carter's literary friends to uphold her as a great figure of English literature makes sense in so far as we understand that, as Bristow and Broughton put it in their collection of essays devoted to the author:

Carter was not always favoured by a literary establishment that sometimes found her messages and her methods troubling [...] Her work anticipated by several years two of the most urgent feminist debates to develop in the 1980s and 1990s: first, the role of pornography as either liberatory or oppressive; and second, the construction of gender as a scripted performance. Few contemporary writers have looked as long and hard as Carter into the cultural construction of male and female sexuality. (1997: 2)

The progress, both as regards themes and narrative methods, which Carter's work proposes, is probably the reason why she did not find an ample and enthusiastic audience in Britain and many parts of Europe until the release of *Nights at the Circus*, in 1984.⁴ Her career, however, always had the support of such distinguished editors as Liz Calder at Victor Gollancz and Carmen Callil at

Virago Press (Bristow & Broughton 1997: 4). Likewise, from the very early stages of her writing, a vigorous critical recognition was given to her novels. In 1968, *Several Perceptions* won the W. Somerset Maugham Award, which provided Carter with the 500 pounds that would take her as far as Japan.

Lorna Sage explains how in Japan Carter “completed a project of estrangement, taking herself as far away from home as possible” (Sage 1994b: 8), so that it became “the place where she lost and found herself” (Sage 1994a: 24). If anything, the trip to Japan was brave in the career of a writer who was just starting to do reasonably well in her own country. This might be regarded as yet another extravagance in the life of Carter, for the moment in which she could have been assimilated into the mainstream of English literature, she decided to “resituate herself on the periphery of another, overwhelmingly alien, culture” (Gamble 1997: 16).⁵ A resituation which would last for no less than three years—from 1969 to 1972— during which she supported herself by writing journalism, publishing fiction, and working as a waitress in bars (Bristow & Broughton 1997: 3). Even though these three years have been described by Linden Peach as “a watershed in [Carter’s] literary career” (1998: 4), the stay in Japan did much more than simply provide her with new ideas; it wholly confirmed her in the way she was developing as a writer.⁶

If anything, Japan allowed Carter to see the world from a politicised perspective. In her own words: “[i]n Japan, I learnt what it is to be a woman and became radicalised” (Carter 1967 NS: 28). Although in a conversation with critic Olga Kenyon, Carter claims that “[t]hough I write for anyone who will read me, in a sense I’m writing for my sisters,” and that she is clearly a product of the

Women's Movement (Kenyon 1992: 24), her relationship with feminist critics and writers was, at the best of times, quite tense.⁷ This estrangement may be due to Carter's manifest support of pornography, as articulated in *The Sadeian Woman* for example.⁸ One of the most controversial areas for feminist critics on Carter, however, has traditionally been the explicit depictions of violence —some of it against women— that may be found in a number of her works, particularly in her early novels. An interesting symbol for the early Carteresque heroine may be found in Ghislaine, the protagonist of *Shadow Dance* (1966), who is described as a "very young girl," with "a little face, all pale," and "so light and fragile and her bones so birdy fine and little and her skin ... almost translucent" (1994 [1966]: 2). Although the narrative voice describes Ghislaine as the most objective approximation to a normative ideal of 'female beauty' almost in fairy-tale fashion, this description soon upsets all expectations when her terrible yet fascinating disfiguring is focused upon:

[t]he scar went all the way down her face, from the corner of her left eyebrow, down, down, down, past nose and mouth and chin until it disappeared below the collar of her shirt. The scar was all red and raw as if, at the slightest exertion, it might open and bleed. (1994 [1966]:

2)

Although thus deformed, Ghislaine exerts an almost magnetic attraction on men. At one and the same time, she becomes one of the most disturbing characters in *Shadow Dance*, and the antecedent for a list of likewise magnetically disturbing characters —both male and female— in the Carteresque universe. Here is a woman for whom the Freudian metaphor of the 'scar of womanhood' is

challengingly transformed into a visible imprint on her face. Not to see it is unavoidable, by which she becomes a walking symbol.⁹

Carter’s feminism may be another expression of her commitment to demolishing —scarring— expectations, highlighting her challenge of preconceptions, and a taste for whatever is unexpected, including the problematic relationship that women may have with their cultural production as ‘feminine’ subjects (Bristow & Broughton 1997: 10). This is an issue that she explores in a solid, up-front manner throughout her writing. As she states in her article “Expletives Deleted”, “a book is simply a container of an idea —like a bottle; what is inside the book is what matters” (Carter 1992 ED: 2); or, in an interview with John Haffenden, where she assesses the role and responsibility of the novel “in helping to explain experience and making the world comprehensible, even if it’s only to the person who’s writing it” (1984: 35).

On another, yet not so different, level, Carter’s way of thinking about the world was strongly influenced by the radicalism of her mother’s family, a family of labourers from Yorkshire, who were closely involved in the Labour Party. This was a community where, according to the author herself, “women rule[d] the roost” (Carter 1982 NS: 8), and where Granny offered hilariously interesting *vignettes*, such as the one that follows:

When she [Carter’s grandmother] gracelessly shoved a plate of food in front of you, she’d growl: ‘Get it down thee,’ with a dreadful menace. She taught me [Carter] how to whistle. She hated tears and whining to no purpose; ‘don’t be soft,’ she’d say. Though she was often wrong,

she was never silly. When I or anyone else was being silly, she would wither me: 'Tha bloody fool'. (Carter 1982 NS: 11)

After reading about her childhood in Yorkshire, one cannot help but wonder whether it was actually Japan which radicalised Carter or this more homegrown experience.

Even though her production as a writer begins in the decade of the 1960s, Carter's work is deeply rooted in the Britain where she grew up, that of the 1940s and 50s. This is an England which, as Peach (1998: 12-13) reminds his readers, saw the introduction of the National Health Service, together with an increasing social mobility. Still, for many women not just in England but throughout Europe, the 1950s were a hard time. From 1946 to 1950 there was a severe rationing, which was popularly sketched by the 1947 magazine *Picture Post* through the figure of "Mrs. Average", an English woman who spent at least an hour a day queuing up for scarce goods (Anderson & Zinsser 1988: 321). By 1960, the standard of living rose again and working-class British people were able to enjoy such luxuries at home as hot running water, refrigerators, ovens, and televisions. Travelling became easier with the rise of car owners (Anderson & Zinsser 1988: 322). These commodities were accompanied by an increase in life expectancy and access to education for all citizens.

The greatest changes for women took place between 1960 and 1985. This is the period that witnessed notorious developments in birth control. Contraception techniques and abortion made it possible for women to bear only the children they wanted; in fact, ever since 1950, birth rates have consistently declined not just in England, but throughout Europe (Anderson & Zinsser 1988:

322). The repercussions that contraception techniques —of which the pill might be the most obvious example— had on the relationship between women and their bodies has been amply analysed by a number of historians, sociologists and academics, both feminist and non-feminist.¹⁰

Carter’s England, that of the 1950s, witnessed the appearance of the ‘Angry Young Men’, whilst her own generation was experiencing the aforementioned rationing, together with increasing advertising campaigns which aimed at attracting women into being housewives rather than working outside the home (Day 1998: 9). Carter is clearly a child of the so-called ‘age of austerity’ and, as her friend and editor Carmen Callil once said, “she thanked the postwar welfare state every day of her life for the good things it gave her” (Day 1998:10).

2.3 Carter and her critics

Although criticism of Carter’s work is widespread and ever-growing, reference should be made here to the works about her *oeuvre* published by Spanish academics. Amongst these, the reader may find a number of articles and essays by Pilar Hidalgo, Isabel Carrera, Fernando Galván, and María Angeles de la Concha, all of which anticipated some of the research on Carter produced by their British colleagues. Mar Pérez Gil’s doctoral thesis is exclusively devoted to the work of Carter. Published by the Universidad de las Palmas de Gran Canaria under the title *La subversión del poder en Angela Carter* (1996); this work has been an immeasurable source of reference and guidance for me throughout this part of my study.

In her book, Pérez Gil provides an insightful analysis of how the genre of the novel becomes a powerful apparatus for making subversion manifest, and to successfully deconstruct any pre-established rules. This relation between the text and power has been a key issue in literary studies ever since the nineteenth century and, although not a literary critic himself, Friedrich Nietzsche made reference to this interesting relation in some his work (Pérez Gil 1996: 29). The number of academics, philosophers and literary critics who have discussed this link has increased in the twentieth century, probably due to the evident development of literature into a discipline that has become increasingly conscious of itself.¹¹ Amongst these, the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva and Edward Said show the reader how, in Pérez Gil's words: "la palabra escrita es un instrumento que crea poder y del que se vale la Cultura y el Mito para afianzarse; pero que también es el vehículo mas poderoso de la subversión" (1996: 29). Hence, the ambivalent relation between the written word and power, one that is clearly laid bare by Carter's texts, where the subversion of rules becomes both a duty and a pleasure.

There are many novels by Carter that I would like to discuss here. In fact, most of them carry literary seductions, fictional scenarios which allow the articulation of subjectivity —socially, sexually, linguistically, politically, culturally. Nevertheless, a number of reasons have led me to select *Heroes and Villains* (1969) as the main object of my study.

Heroes and Villains is one of the most complex texts by Carter and, as such, it anticipates most of the elements which will characterise her later works. Hence, the novel is 'typical' —if such a term could be applied to this author— in

its deployment of a multiplicity of genres, for example. The fairy tale, the Gothic mode, the picaresque, science fiction and utopian fiction are all woven together in a novel in which intertextual play is also constantly present. The reader of Shakespeare will enjoy the subtle references to *The Tempest* (c. 1610), and those who have a taste for Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) will also be satisfied by the intertextual dialogue that Carter’s novel establishes with Swift’s text. The novel features a young heroine, Marianne, who embarks on a physical journey, which will have unavoidable psychological repercussions for her. *Heroes and Villains* is an ‘open’ novel, both because it refuses to provide a sealed plot completion, and because it is susceptible to a multiplicity of interpretations, which caters for a reading which I hope will also be ramified, postmodernly ambiguous yet satisfying, and which will allow debate and the problematisation of issues at work throughout Carter’s career. If, as Lorna Sage claims, “[w]e want our representative works to be multivoiced, dialogic, hybrid” (Sage 1994b: 3), then *Heroes and Villains* definitely lives up to the standard of ‘representative’ in its multiplicity of voices, its penetrating dialogism, its hybridity. Last but not least, the novel also provides a literary seduction for the reader who will find himself/herself immersed in a voluptuous world of fantasy and eroticism fabricated through a lavish use of language.

2.4 Ruined cities of heroes and villains

“... what does the word ‘city’ mean?”

She thought for a while.

‘Ruins?’ she hazarded” —Angela Carter, *Heroes and Villains*, 7

The novel's point of departure is wild, raw. The world as it is known is no more than a mirage in *Heroes and Villains*. It is not so much that the novel starts *in media res* but, rather, that the setting directs the reader to a self-destruction and violence of the most sophisticated kind. A nuclear war has successfully severed the world into three great sections, irreconcilable amongst themselves and constantly at strife. The Professors, the Barbarians and the Out People live in their self-made microcosms, each group suspicious of the others and avoiding, as much as possible, any contact with them. Three large chunks of what is left of humanity stand devoid of any human contact not just amongst themselves, but also within the walls of their own societies.

Within this chaos of pseudo-civilisations, there is a young woman, a typically Carteresque heroine in so far as she is "sensible, sassy and resourceful" (Kaveney 1994: 186). Utterly dissatisfied with her lot as a Professor girl, Marianne decides to escape with a beautiful Barbarian who proudly wears the name of Jewel, but whose violent behaviour pays little homage to this title. From this moment on, the novel can effectively be read as a reflection on how Marianne constructs and deconstructs—in every sense of the word—her subjectivity, her Lacanian *Innenwelt*, always in relation to the *Umwelt* that both communities, Professors and Barbarians, represent. My thesis in relation to this novel will be to demonstrate that Jewel is no more than an invention of Marianne's imagination and, therefore, that he does not exist outside the realm of her powerful imagination. Thus Jewel—and everything he stands for—will be read as no more than a sensual, and sexual, figment of Marianne's teenage fantasy, a beautiful and useful Other that will allow her to construct her self/ herself.

Notes

¹ The use of the expression “re-writing” to describe what Angela Carter and other authors such as Olga Broumas, Margaret Atwood, and Liz Lochhead construct in relation to traditional fairy tales has always been troubling for me. Although it is true that the sources for the stories in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* are to be found amongst the fairy tales and folk tales of the past transcribed by the Brothers Grimm and Perrault, among others, it would be unfair not to recognise that Carter creates new stories from the common elements that the sources propose. Therefore, although there is an undeniable literary ‘debt’ towards the ‘original’ fairy tales, I still find that the use of “re-writing” conveys an idea of continuity which the new (per)versions effectively undermine.

² For a discussion of the deconstruction of the Victorian myth of the “Angel in the House” in the literature by women, see Lynn Pykett’s *The ‘Improper’ Feminine: The Women’s Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (1992), and Lucie Armitt’s *Contemporary Women’s Fiction and the Fantastic* (2000). For the relation between the myth of the “Angel in the House” and Victorian assumptions of female passivity, see John Maynard’s *Victorian Discourses on Sexuality and Religion* (1993). Full publication details of this work under the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

³ Some of the most interesting studies on this novel can be found in Lucie Armitt’s *Contemporary Women’s Fiction and the Fantastic* (2000) and the collection of essays edited by Lorna Sage in 1994 entitled *Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter*. For full publication details, see the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

⁴ It was in that year too when one of her stories in *The Bloody Chamber*, “The Company of Wolves”, was filmed by Neil Jordan with considerable success. This no doubt contributed to the author’s popularity, as Carter co-wrote the film script with Jordan. The film became extremely popular and it is considered a cult film by the fans of fantasy cinema throughout the world. For an interesting study of Carter’s short story and its film version, see Maggie Anwell’s “Lolita Meets the Werewolf: The Company of Wolves,” in L. Gamman and M. Marshment’s *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture* (1988), pp. 76-85. Full publication details under the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

⁵ I use the expression “another extravagance” in an ironic way. Lorna Sage, a good friend of Carter’s, tells her readers how the life of the author was ‘extravagant’ in the eyes of some in so far as she had an early marriage and divorce and travelled widely before

settling with a much younger partner having a baby in her forties (see Sage 1992a *passim*).

⁶ This can be seen quite clearly as far as the use of certain motifs is concerned. For instance, in the author's taste for the use of tattooing as a metaphor, the meaning of which may vary according to context. This interest, which can be found in *Heroes and Villains*, a novel written before Carter's Japanese experience, was further explored through her stay in the distant country through the Japanese tattooing technique called *irezumi*, which Carter learnt about in Japan (see *Nothing Sacred*, part Two, pp. 29-51, full publication details under the **Works Cited** section of the present study).

⁷ Lorna Sage explains how Carter's experience in Albany, where she taught writing in 1988, was far from pleasant, as the author wrote on a letter to Sage: 'the only snag is the Women's Studies department, which is truly terrifying —really hard line radical feminists, who have virtually boycotted me'" (1994a: 41).

⁸ See the "Polemical Preface" (pp. 3-37) in *The Sadeian Woman*.

⁹ Freud's essay "Feminine Sexuality" is included in volume 21 of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (1953-1965). Full publication details under the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

¹⁰ See, for instance, *The New Women's Movement*, edited by Drude Dahlerup (1986); *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, by Chris Weedon (1987); *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girls' Development*, by Lyn M. Brown & Carol Gilligan (1992); *Knowing Women: Feminism and Knowledge*, edited by Helen Crowley and Sue Himmelweilt (1992); *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, by Elizabeth Grosz (1994); For full publication details, see the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

¹¹ Linda Hutcheon's label for this self-conscious trend in fiction —'Metafiction'— has had a wide acceptance in academia. A good example of this kind of fiction may be found in the work of novelist John Fowles, among others. See *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989, esp. chapter 3 "Representing the past"). For full publication details of Hutcheon's book, see the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

3. “Then all was chaos”: *Heroes and Villains* in Con-Text

“This is the right fun-house mirror after all, the one where we catch intimate, fugitive reflections of our own strangeness” —Lorna Sage, *Flesh and the Mirror*, 1

Heroes and Villains (hereafter, *Heroes*) has been described as “Carter’s first venture into science fiction” (Gamble 1997: 73). Published in 1969, the novel evidently connects with a popular concern of the time of its publication by employing a familiar science-fiction convention: the fear that a nuclear war would extinguish the world. Thus, it could easily be catalogued as a mere exercise in science-fiction, for it is a perfect example of a “fiction of ideas” asking ““What if?””, the two main characteristics of this genre, according to the description made by Aidan Day in his study on the novel (1998: 9). Day explains how *Heroes* “takes the trope from the Cold War world of the 1960s and is set in a post-holocaust future” (1998: 41). However, as he acknowledges, there is more to *Heroes* than sci-fi. The aim of the present chapter is to offer a brief outline of the critical assessment which the novel has received. It also describes the universe proposed

by Carter in the narrative as a dystopia of fiercely dichotomised opposites against which Marianne stands as an individual.

3.1 Heroes and Villains

“‘The soldiers are heroes but the Barbarians are villains,’ said the son of the Professor of Mathematics aggressively, ‘I’m a hero. I’ll shoot you.’ ‘Oh, no, you won’t,’ said Marianne, and grimaced frightfully. ‘I’m not playing’” —Angela Carter, *Heroes and Villains*, 2

Even though, according to Sarah Gamble, there was an active commitment on the side of Carter to make *Heroes* a different novel from the kind she had been writing before (1997: 74), the text undeniably shares some common elements with her previous works. It could likewise be argued that *Heroes* clearly directs Carter’s career in terms of her future literary interests, as will be dwelt upon subsequently.

Heroes shares many points of contact, for instance, with a novel written two years before, *The Magic Toyshop* (1967). The two texts revel in the use of Gothic sensibilities and toy with a certain amount of fairy-tale imagery; the two use an adolescent female heroine who undergoes a kind of quest that will bring about many discoveries, especially those that concern her subjectivity. This concern is made clear from the very first lines of *The Magic Toyshop*, where we find the young protagonist, Melanie, busying her summer days with exciting explorations:

The summer she was fifteen, Melanie discovered she was made of flesh and blood. O, my America, my new found land. She embarked on a tranced voyage, exploring the whole of herself, clambering her own mountain ranges, penetrating the moist richness of her secret valleys, a physiological Cortez, da Gama or Mungo Park. For hours she stared at

herself, naked, in the mirror of her wardrobe; she would follow with her finger the elegant structure of her rib-cage, where the heart fluttered under the flesh like a bird under a blanket, and she would draw down the long line from breast-bone to navel (which was a mysterious cavern or grotto), and she would rasp her palms against her bud-wing shoulderblades. (Carter 1992 [1967]: 1)

Melanie's is a journey that Marianne, the protagonist of *Heroes*, will also undergo, albeit in a somewhat different manner. Although there is also a lot of pleasure in Marianne's own "tranced voyage" (Carter 1992 [1967]: 1), this is relentlessly tinged with overtones of extreme violence. This might be one of the differences between the two novels, by which it could be argued that *Heroes* is somewhat more mature in its repeated, yet subtle, use of images of violence, a characteristic that makes the text under discussion ultimately more realistic, as paradoxical as this statement may seem in the light of the novel's choice of a genre.¹

There are also common elements between *Heroes* and two of Carter's previous novels; namely, *Shadow Dance* —her first novel, written in 1966— and *Several Perceptions* (1968) but, here, these relate to the scenario portrayed in the three texts. The dismal and depressing post-apocalyptic scenery of *Heroes* is sadly similar to the suburban landscapes that give shape to the setting for the two previous novels.

In the words of Pérez Gil, *Heroes* "culmina la trayectoria literaria de Carter en la década de los sesenta," by offering a "cuestionamiento radical de las doctrinas caducas y de las estructuras sociales" (1996: 19-20) through the portrait of a broken, scarred world that is nothing but the ambiguously postmodern shadow of

its former self. It also explores, to a certain degree, a number of elements that would subsequently become paramount in the production of the writer. Some of these —of which the tattoo motif would be a good example— reverberate in her later novels, whilst some are echoed through the multiple instances of self-reflexivity which permeates Carter's production.

Already in the title, the novel parades a promise which is not fulfilled in its development. The title points to a universe of 'heroes' and 'villains', polarities which are comfortable for the reader to identify, to pin down. The text seems to be inviting its readers to lie back and relax with an exercise on science-fiction. Ambiguity, however, turns into literary flesh in the character of Marianne. Is this, one wonders, really a story of 'heroes and villains', when the main character is a 'heroine'? And, more to the point, where does Marianne fit in those pleasant, convenient, even homely binaries that the title itself sets out? As usual, Carter initially furnishes the minds of her readers with great expectations that her narrative deconstructs, almost with gluttonous pleasure.²

The little guidance that the title offers is somewhat enhanced by a number of epigraphs placed outside the actual realms of the novel. These are from assorted sources, yet further evidence of the fact that the list of influences on this author is large, to say the least. The first quote is from the film *Alphaville*, released in 1965 by French filmmaker and writer Jean-Luc Godard, one of the leaders of the *nouvelle vague*. According to the words chosen by Carter from Godard's film, when reality cannot possibly be communicated orally, because of its complexity, one must recur to "Legend", which "gives it a form by which it pervades the whole world" (Carter 1969: epigraph page).³ Thus reality becomes fake —for what was

reality in the first place anyway, the novel will be asking— but comfortably universal and thus understandable for a much wider number of its readers. This assertion also points to the related idea that reality *per se* does not exist, and can only be represented through different perspectives or, in poststructuralist terms, different subject positions, one of the points that the text is at pains to make.

The second quote is from a poem by Andrew Marvell entitled “The Unfortunate Lover”. The “unfortunate lover” of the title is connected to the representation of Jewel in the novel, whose main identity as a “Lover” —much like that other famous “Lover” in English literature, Oliver Mellors— is outlined from his very first appearance. In Carter’s text, he thrusts a knife —the “Thunder” in Marvell’s poem which he “Cuff[s] with one hand” (HV epigraph page)— into Marianne’s brother’s throat, an image that becomes indelible in the young girl’s imaginary, and one to which she will obsessively return, even years later. Jewel is unfortunate in so far as he will face the destiny of many other heroic Demon-Lover types, which is to die young and leave a beautiful corpse —for beauty is a feature that the novel obsessively concentrates on.

Carter’s third choice is from a canonical text within academic writing, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, by Leslie A. Fiedler. This particular quote from Fiedler’s text points to the parodic overtones of the Gothic mode, a mode which is extensively used throughout the novel. Fiedler, however, points to the relation between the use of Gothic and the introduction of the grotesque. This, as will be argued later on, is one of the multiple readings that the novel allows for.

Finally, the last reference is to *Manon Lescaut*, by Abbé Prévost. The quote tells the reader about the promise of leaving for “un pays inconnu” (HV epigraph

page) —an unknown country— inhabited by wild beasts and wilder savages. This is a reference that the reader may identify with the voyage that Marianne undertakes in the novel and which connects with Carter's choice of the picaresque as one of the genres which she re-deploys in it, together with the Gothic.

Carter is generous with her readers, and offers them four quotes as guidelines for their journey into her text. The epigraphs help the reader outline some of the basic sources of the tale, both as concerns content and form. Before the actual narrative starts, therefore, the reader is allowed to reflect on certain motifs, genres and topics which the novel will obsessively, yet subtly, revolve around: the epistemological absurdity of trying to represent reality, the construction of the heroic Other, the Gothic mode and its connections with the grotesque, and the issue of travelling beyond physical boundaries. *Heroes and Villains* is about all these, and many more.

3.2 Criticism on *Heroes and Villains*

Critical readings of *Heroes* are scarce in the essay collections that have lately been launched by a number of publishing houses on the work of Carter.⁴ Critic Lorna Sage describes the landscape of *Heroes* as “partly a mocking code for the mental landscape of a late 1960s woman intellectual —the glamour of the guerilla underground and various vagrant counter-cultural movements, the siege of university campuses, etc” (Sage 1994a: 18). If this is so, then it is interesting to assess why *Heroes* has not received the critical attention I consider it deserves, and has often been rated merely as yet an exercise in science-fiction by a non-sci-fi author. For Elizabeth Mahoney, this scarce critical attention has no *raison d'être*

for a novel which “undermines conventional codings of feminine sexuality as silent, dependent, passive or masochistic” and “interrogates feminine sexuality from ‘elsewhere’ in terms of time, space and place” thus calling into question a multiplicity of binary structures (Mahoney 1997: 73).

In her essay, “But elsewhere?: the future of fantasy in *Heroes and Villains*” (1997), Mahoney provides an explanation as to why *Heroes* has been repeatedly and unfairly disregarded by critics. She claims that “[d]ystopian fictions have until recently been critically disregarded, dismissed as derivative popular fiction” and that “women’s experimentation with the genre has been doubly marginalized” (1997: 74).⁵ The critic then proceeds to cover the critical gap on this particular novel, with an essay the main aim of which is to demonstrate that *Heroes* “encourages us to confront the ‘bad place’ that heterosexual desire might be and to consider, specifically, women’s location within that ‘bad place’” (1997: 75).

Although my own reading of the novel could not agree less with Mahoney’s articulation of heterosexual desire as a “bad place” (1997: 75), I find her point about the minimal critical repercussion that *Heroes* has had amongst the studies on Carter a valid one. However, far from agreeing with her statement that “women’s experimentation with [dystopian fiction] has been ... marginalised” (Mahoney 1997: 74), I would be inclined to believe that, in Carter’s particular case, each and every book is so rich in references and readings, that critics cannot help but disregard certain features of her production, of which *Heroes* would be an example. It might be for this reason that critics have tended to focus with greater interest on *Nights at the Circus*, a choice which probably has to do with the fact that it was this particular novel that provided Carter with the inclusion of her name

in the Booker Prize shortlist, which in turn provided both author and text with an enormous degree of popularity.

Mahoney's statement about the marginalisation of dystopian fictions by women is dismantled through passing reference to the amount of popularity that Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), for instance, has achieved. This is a novel that would prove a perfect example of what Mahoney labels as "women's experimentation with [dystopian fiction]" (1997: 74) and yet, far from having been marginalised, it has reached a wide number of readers all around the Western world, not just in English-speaking countries, almost becoming a best-seller.⁶

In line with Atwood's text, *Heroes and Villains* is a post-apocalyptic novel, with literary roots in "an older sort of decline-of-civilisation novel which goes back to Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) or Richard Jefferies's *After London* (1885)" (Kaveney 1994: 176). At the same time, however, the novel is also an example of what Tzvetan Todorov describes as 'the literary fantastic', in so far as it "leaves its reader in a state of hesitation between a supernatural and a natural explanation of the events described in the text" (Day 1998: 5). A refusal to declare whether these events have a natural or supernatural explanation is characteristic of all fantastic literature, and no less present in *Heroes*. Following Todorov's argument, fantastic literature seeks to articulate what is repressed; one might want to call this 'the unconscious' or another label might be chosen. This is exactly what the reader will be confronted with in the present novel. *Heroes* openly bespeaks Marianne's repressed side, which is brought to the surface, becoming

flesh in the character of Jewel, while refusing to declare its presumed natural or supernatural explanation.

In her writings on the fantastic, critic Judith Butler argues that fantasy is the arena “to be privileged in any contestation of conventional configurations of identity, gender and the representation of desire” (Mahoney 1997: 75). Through the enacted scenario of her ‘fantasy’, Marianne is allowed to explore the representation of her desire —Jewel—, by which she has a chance to construct her (unconventional) configuration of identity, in turn closely linked to her gender. By the end of the novel, Marianne is able to weave her subjectivity (as a ‘woman’) via her own personal quest through the realms of fantasy, seduction and desire. This is not to say that the novel offers a monolithic, stable, essential version of the subject that Marianne becomes —against ‘the’ ultimate conclusion, there is the challenging strength of the novel’s open-endedness, for instance— but, on the contrary, the text is a voyage that takes Marianne —and Jewel— through a number of temporary, unstable, and always-at-risk subject positions. This, in turn, makes it difficult for the reader to allocate the ultimate, monolithic status of ‘victim’, ‘other’ or even ‘subject’ in either of the two main characters, or in any other character, as will be seen.

This Butlerian “chaotic multiplicity of representations” (Mahoney 1997: 76), far from complicating the task of understanding Marianne’s process, allows for the problematised positioning of the narrative of Marianne’s identity in a ‘third space’, a utopian *locus* where such a desire from such a subject position is made possible and articulated. Hence Mahoney’s claim that *Heroes* “signals the opening up of new representational spaces for sexual identity, ones that can accommodate

new fantasies from autonomous feminine subjects” (Mahoney 1997: 77). My point here will be that Marianne survives hell and high water at the end of the novel precisely because she is an autonomous subject. Her autonomy is, ultimately, what renders her able to construct her subjectivity, and to become an agent in the process.

3.3 Identity (de)constructed

“Losing their names, ... things underwent a process of uncreation and reverted to chaos” —Angela Carter, *Heroes and Villains*, 136

As has been illustrated at the beginning of this section, *Heroes* was not the first time that Carter’s narrative concerned itself with a young woman entranced in the exploration of her sexuality and, with it, her subjectivity. Reference to Melanie’s exciting discoveries in the summer time has already been made. Nevertheless, *Heroes* is much more radical in its representation of female desire than *The Magic Toyshop*, in so far as the point of view that the latter offers is always ‘outside’ Melanie herself. This is an important development that Carter decides to take from her earlier novels; here, in *Heroes*, the perspective, the focaliser in narratological terms, is always Marianne, and the text is at pains to demonstrate this point from the very first line, where we are told that “Marianne had sharp, cold eyes” (HV 1). Here, and elsewhere in the narrative, the emphasis is on Marianne’s eyes, and it is an emphasis that the novel refuses to dissipate. The prominence of the woman’s gaze, both on her self and on the world around her, is paramount and it effectively monopolises the text.

Consequently, *Heroes* functions as a shattered mirror upon which Marianne is allowed to “catch intimate, fugitive reflections of [her] own strangeness” (Sage 1994b: 1). A text where the construction that Marianne is —as a character, as a young woman, as a Professor girl, as a subject who desires— is continuously reconstructed and put at risk, and thus de-constructed by herself in relational struggle to the representations of her by those around her.

Those around her —the Professors and the Barbarians— are, apparently, clearly polarised. As will be demonstrated, the community of the Professors is totalitarian, rational, and sexually repressive, whereas the Barbarian society is similar to a tribe, whereby all the members of the community shape a family nucleus and an apparent state of chaos is sovereign. Where the former could be equated to the dominant discourse in the Age of Reason, the latter has more than one parallel with either Jonathan Swift’s Yahoos or Romantic passion. Within this metaphorical proposal, Marianne is swept away not just from one community to another, but from one age to another, in a metaphorical voyage that reminds the reader of that other famous pilgrimage through the centuries in English literature, the one performed by Virginia Woolf’s Orlando.

Accordingly, Marianne, focaliser and postmodern Orlando, travels from one community to the other in the *blasé* manner of a scientist or a sociologist, always keeping her distance with a view to inspecting and scrutinising closely. This in itself will demonstrate that the conventional boundaries, binaries, and even differences between the two cultures are as artificial and arbitrary as the ‘Wall’ that separated Shakespeare’s farcical lovers, Pyramus and Thisby, in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (c. 1600). And just like the ‘Wall’ in the Renaissance play, they are

culturally constructed and maintained exclusively for the warped benefit of the two societies.

3.4 In Professorland

“[Marianne] peered through the iron bars at the village. It appeared diminutive, from this height, and very tidy and brightly-coloured, like a place where everyone was happy” —Angela Carter, *Heroes and Villains*, 3-4

The society of the Professors is presented as an extremely rational environment from the very early stages of the novel. This is a community where Marianne’s pet rabbit is eviscerated after dying, so that the cause of death can be diagnosed. Nothing is left to the hands of fate, the unknown has no place amongst the Professors. Even though Marianne is gone from the community for the largest part of the novel, the Professors are always a shadowy and menacing presence throughout her journey, and the superlative rationality the society inflicts upon its subjects is constantly felt. This shadow acquires a definite shape towards the end of the novel, where Marianne and Jewel find themselves on a beach from where they can see a lighthouse. To Marianne:

[The lighthouse] looked like the twin of the white tower in which she had been born and she was very much moved for, though neither tower any longer cast a useful light, both still served to warn and inform of surrounding dangers. Thus this tower glimpsed in darkness symbolized and clarified her resolution. (HV 139)

The references to another famous lighthouse in English literature, the one described by Virginia Woolf in *To the Lighthouse* (1927), may be considered

obvious. Woolf's tower, like Carter's, also warned "abhor shipwreck" and "go in fear of *unreason*" (HV 139, my italics); the Ramsays, just like Marianne, cannot but fall "in love with the integrity of the lighthouse" (HV 139).

The extract quoted above appears in the final stages of the novel, where Marianne seems to discover that her sensual and erotic escapades through Barbarianland will not acquire meaning unless they are assessed through the 'integrity' filter that the Professor society furnished her infant mind with. It is at this point, which, incidentally, occurs towards the end of her physical and metaphorical picaresque experience, that there can be felt a certain reconciliation on the part of Marianne with her past, with her place of origin; "this tower glimpsed in darkness symbolized and clarified her resolution" (HV 139). The psychological idea of 'home', of 'origins', is lost and found in the narrative.

3.4.1 Disciplines and Punishments

"'There is not enough discipline,' [Marianne's uncle] said" —Angela Carter, *Heroes and Villains*, 15

An escapade from the Professor society is not easy, both physically and psychologically speaking. The whole land over which this particular civilisation extends itself is surrounded by watch towers the purpose of which is ambiguous: it is difficult to know whether they are present to prevent any unwanted visitors from coming in or, rather, to prevent inhabitants from escaping:

Besides the wire netting around the boundaries of the cultivated land were the watch towers manned with machine guns stood on stilts at intervals; there was also a stout wall topped with barbed wire round

the village itself. The only entry through this wall was a large wooden gate where the sentry post was. (HV 3)

Security codes in the Professor community, as the above quote demonstrates, are as strict as their timetables. The ambiguity perceptible in the idea of security that the Soldiers display reminds the reader of Bentham's Panopticon, a strangely-shaped prison that Michel Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish* (1977):

at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. By the effect of blacklighting one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cell of the periphery. (Foucault 1991 [1977]: 200)

With its peculiar guise, the major effect of the Panopticon is to make the inmate believe that he/she is constantly being watched, so that he/she becomes "subjected to a field of visibility, ... assumes responsibility for the constraints of power" and "makes them play spontaneously upon himself" (Foucault 1991 [1977]: 202). The greatest achievement of the structure is to make the watch soldier unnecessary by creating a physical space which successfully manipulates the inmate into believing that the former is always there. Psychological discipline is the hardest to

administer, but it is also the most effective: with its disposition, the inmate “assumes responsibility for the constraints of power” (Foucault 1991 [1977]: 202), no external agent is needed. No wonder that, amidst this atmosphere of dehumanised surveillance, even the Soldiers look like machines to Marianne: “the moonlight glistened so strangely on the glass visors and slick leather limbs of the Soldiers they seemed mechanical, ingenious objects” (HV 21).

The central tower —read ‘power’— of the Panopticon, as Mar Pérez Gil argues: “hacia palpable su existencia a través de métodos verbales y no verbales y se filtraba, sin ser notado, en el modo de ser, pensar y actuar del individuo” (1996: 35). It is this tower, remarkably similar to the one Marianne spends her early childhood in, that represents the most obviously repressive side of power: “Marianne lived in a white tower made of steel and concrete” (HV 1), and she “was not allowed to go outside the outer wire fence away from the community” (HV 2). This tower, however, has parallels with the other tower, the one which appears at the end of the novel in the shape of the aforementioned lighthouse and representing not repressive power, but a balance, a certain equilibrium between rationality and chaos. In Carter’s narrative, just like in Woolf’s, symbols are not constructed as monolithic blocks that the reader comes up against in his/her reading of the novel. They change and metamorphose according to the different stages and contexts that character and reader may reach, thus laying bare the ambiguity of all symbols in their multiplicity of meaning.

Evidence of this point is that the motif of the Foucauldian Panopticon would be re-deployed by Carter many years later in her successful and

extraordinary *Nights at the Circus*, where a prison, exclusively for women inmates, is described thus:

It was a *panopticon* she forced them to build, a hollow circle of cells, shaped like a doughnut, the inward-facing wall of which was composed of grids of steel and, in the middle of the roofed, central courtyard, there was a round room surrounded by windows. In that room [the female warden would] sit all day and stare and stare and stare at the murderesses and they, in turn, sat all day and stared at her. (1984: 210, italics in original)

As a concept, the white tower points to a further set of connotations. It suggestively creates the idea of incarceration within the domestic sphere, an idea that was widely explored by the nineteenth-century genre labelled ‘female Gothic’ (Howard 1994), and which paved the way for the re-fashioning of this genre by twentieth century —not necessarily female— authors.

3.4.2 Neo-Gothic Parodies

“The Gothic mode is essentially a form of parody, a way of assailing clichés by exaggerating them to the limit of grotesqueness” —Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, epigraph to *Heroes and Villains*

Passing reference has already been made to the use of the Gothic mode in Carter, especially through the quote from Leslie Fiedler as epigraph to *Heroes*. All in all, it could be argued that there are three works by Carter that could be regarded as closely following the tradition of this genre: *The Magic Toyshop*, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* and the novel under discussion.

According to Rosemary Jackson, it is no coincidence that so many writers within the Gothic tradition are women. She cites a few, amongst whom can be found the Brontë sisters, Christina Rossetti, Sylvia Plath and Angela Carter herself, all of whom, according to Jackson, have “employed the fantastic to subvert *patriarchal* society” (Howard 1994: 53, italics in original).

Rosemary Jackson made the first references to this “alternative tradition” that she labelled “female Gothic”, the common element of which was that it enabled women writers who had recourse to this mode to fantasise “a violent attack upon the symbolic order” (Howard 1994: 54). Thereafter, this idea was further pursued by Ellen Moers who, in her articles in the *New York Review of Books* in 1974, argued that the Gothic work of women writers since the eighteenth century included “expressions of women’s sexual feelings, particularly fear, guilt, repression and anxiety” (Moers in Howard 1994: 59). In their famous study *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar follow this line of argument and, concentrating more exhaustively on spatial imagery, they demonstrate that the woman writer makes extensive use of images of enclosure through the depiction of places which are alien, incomprehensible—even exotic—to them.

Over the nineteenth century, a large number of women writers used the Gothic mode in order to subvert traditional Victorian beliefs about femininity and to explore their fears through the use of mysterious and enigmatic scenarios. The clearest reference here would be Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), where Jane’s discovery of the ‘madwoman’, Bertha Mason, in the attic of Mr Rochester’s mansion, has a decisive impact on her narrative of the self, and could be paralleled,

to a certain extent, to Bluebeard's young wife's discovery of countless corpses of his ex-wives in his secret, bloody chamber.⁷

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, transgression acquires a stronger appeal in these narratives, with its most definite expression possibly personified possibly in the androgynous figure that Virginia Woolf writes about in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), and which yields its fruits in the shape of the amazon utopias produced much later by some female writers. A good example of this kind of work is *Woman on the Edge of Time*, by Marge Piercy (1979).⁸

The use of the Gothic in Carter's work relates to the incipient interest for this mode that is recovered by many twentieth century authors, of which *The Cement Garden*, by Ian McEwan (1978) or *Asylum*, by Patrick McGrath (1996) would be examples. Fernando Galván has argued that the use of Gothic in the Carteresque text has a twofold objective: on the one hand, it allows the author to explore the oppressive sexual myths that women have been subjected to and, on the other, it provides an arena for the demythification of social institutions (Pérez Gil 1994: 144). This twofold intention is clearly at work in the novel under study here, *Heroes and Villains*.

It is impossible to overlook, however, the fact that Carter chooses Fiedler's words to open her 'Gothic tale' of sorts. In these, as has been pointed out above, Fiedler argues that the Gothic mode is essentially a form of parody, and it is indeed a parodic tone that the reader will find in one of the most typically Gothic passages of Carter's novel. Marianne, at the age of 6, is locked in a tower during a May Day festival because she keeps pestering everybody who tries to make any arrangements for the celebration:

She sat on the bare boards in the middle of the floor and looked about her. A creeper wound in through the open window like a snake; there were all kinds of snakes in the forest, several of them venomous, which was not so before. Marianne was not frightened to be left alone but she was very angry. She went out on to the balcony, which squeaked beneath her feet. She peered through the iron bars at the village. It appeared diminutive, from this height, and very tidy and brightly-coloured, like a place where everyone was happy. [...] Now she was left alone and forgotten, high in the tower on such a beautiful day. [...] A bird came and perched on the balcony. It cocked its head and offered her a cynical regard. It was a seagull. 'Hello, bird,' she said. 'Have you come a long way? Have you seen any Barbarians?'. (HV 3-4)

The reworking of clichés is what renders this particular passage parodic. The girl child is alone in a tower, looking over the balcony at the town far below. A bird — in itself a cliché extensively used by women writers—⁹ perches itself on the balcony, as a symbol of the freedom that she is longing for. The Gothic mode is used here in an extremely playful manner, and that this approach to the genre is made extensive to the novel as a whole. Even the main plot line conforms to a Gothic cliché, used in the same parodic and humorous fashion: middle-class girl meets working-class Demon-Lover type, escapes with him, is put through all sorts of misfortunes, and finally comes through stronger and wiser at the other end.

Carter, however, revels in the use of the Gothic in order to subvert the obvious expectations the mode itself sets at a narratological level. After all, as critic Lorna Sage claims: "[Carter] never accepted the madwoman-in-the-attic

school of thought about the woman writer, particularly not about the Gothic or fantastic writer” (Sage 1994a: 31). The paragraph quoted above is pertinent to make this point clearer. It is precisely because Marianne is incarcerated in the white tower, that she has a chance to get the best view in town of the first Barbarian raid plus murder in her life, which will be a landmark in her process of self-exploration and self-construction. This means that, ultimately, this incarceration turns out to be ‘a blessing in disguise’ in so far as, first and foremost, it saves Marianne from a more than probable death and, secondly, it provides her with the image that will stimulate her curiosity for the exotic and diametrically opposite culture that her lover-to-be belongs to and personifies. Paradoxically, then, it is the punishment that her own society inflicts on her, to teach her to behave like a ‘good girl’, that transforms Marianne into the inquisitive — ‘bad’ or even ‘antisocial’— adolescent that she becomes.

3.4.3 Utopian Faultlines

“A look-out in a watch tower had already been strangled to let [the Barbarians] through and the men at the sentry post were playing cards so they did not see the visitors in time; two Soldiers paying the price of lack of discipline were shot. Then all was chaos” —Angela Carter, *Heroes and Villains*, 4

The Barbarian raid that Marianne witnesses is also interesting for my discussion here. For four pages into the novel, Carter has been building up a setting of boredom and barrenness amongst the Professor folk. This is clearly seen, for instance, in the idea that time seems to be frozen in the village: “[Marianne] never felt that time was passing for time was frozen around her in this secluded place where a pastoral quiet possessed everything and the busy clock carved the hours

into sculptures of ice” (HV 1). The reader has a clear feeling that time simply does not pass in the Professor society, yet Carter skilfully plays with this ‘time’ and with point of view in almost a cinematographic way, to achieve moments of intense climax, an instance of which would be the description of the Barbarian attack.¹⁰

The immediate effects of such an attack are, at the best of times, quite thought-provoking: a woman disappears to go with the Barbarians, “as sometimes happened,” the narrative voice casually states (HV 6). This in itself would be enough evidence to indicate that the ‘utopia’ that the Professors have tried to construct has faultlines, possibly inherent to the utopian system itself, from the one described by Thomas More onwards. The disappearance of the unnamed woman anticipates Marianne’s for if there is something that the novel is at pains to make clear from the very beginning, it is that the young girl does not quite fit amongst her own people. Not even in the father figure—even though they love each other deeply—can Marianne find any solace. Their differing views are metaphorised in the words that the narrative voice—always focalised through Marianne—provides: her father has “shortness of sight” and “would soon go blind” (HV 8).

The aura of spiritual barrenness that surrounds the Professors is possibly the largest shortcoming of the community from Marianne’s point of view. An example of this is to be found in the book that her father is writing and that “maybe nobody in the community may want to read ..., except Marianne, and she might not understand it” (HV 8). The above comment also points to the fact that this is a world where ideas have lost their power of communication and, thus, to effect any change. Another instance of how barrenness is related to lack of communication, in this case personal, is Marianne’s comment that: “[s]ometimes she thought [her

father] was not talking to her at all but to himself or to a congregation of scholars who only existed in his mind” (HV 9). The novel is pointing here to the idea that spiritual infertility and incommunication occur when, even though there exists a transmitter, the receiver is either absent or simply not interested.

There are, however, moments in which the community at large break from this self-enforced slumber. These function as minor catharses whereby Workers go mad and set fire to the house where their families live, going on to throw themselves from the balcony of the Professor tower, and old men break into museums to wreck treasures and write graffiti on the walls. These moments serve not only as catharses, but also as exemplary tales. This is the outcome of the old man who takes intellectual justice by the throat: “[t]he Soldiers shot him when he was going to set the place on fire” (HV 9). Such is the common end of any attempt against the totalitarian system.

Midst all this rationality, Marianne is bored. Her father might turn blind one day but he can still see, and notices this, hence his words: “I know you’d rather not live here but there is nowhere else to go and chaos is the opposite pole of boredom” (HV 11). These words by the father become almost a mantra throughout the novel. Nevertheless, what he does not know is that there is always somewhere else to go, and a determined girl like Marianne is bound to find it, even when the ‘new place’ turns out to be more boring than boredom itself.

During the first Barbarian raid, the members of the attacking tribe are described as “hobgoblins of nightmare” (HV 5), by which Marianne is suddenly and unexpectedly propelled into a world of “rags, knives, bells and chains,” but also one where there is “a good deal of blood” (HV 5). The mixture of seduction,

pleasure, exoticism and danger of the unknown is what the Barbarians stand for in the novel and it has parallels with the rendering of the passage from childhood into adolescence and adulthood that we can find throughout Carter's work. This is true especially when it comes to women for, in the passage from girlhood to womanhood there also is "a good deal of blood" (HV 5), and not just metaphorically speaking. This first raid, then, functions as a solid catharsis in Marianne's tale of becoming, but its impact is not as penetrating as the second raid years later.

3.4.4 Fairy Tales Revisited

"Marianne lived in a white tower made of steel and concrete [...] She had long, blonde pigtailed. She broke things to see what they were like inside" —Angela Carter, *Heroes and Villains*, 1

The reference to the Barbarians as "hobgoblins" (HV 5), referred to above, is connected to Carter's use of popular genres in her narrative. To a certain extent, this point was tackled in my discussion on the deployment of the Gothic mode, which is considered to be a popular sub-genre of mainstream literature. Nevertheless, in *Heroes*, there is ample use of fairy-tale imagery and technique, a form for which Carter obviously feels an appeal. This particular novel is not proposed as a re-writing of any popular fairy tale, and yet the plot line rings more than one bell. A fleeting glimpse at the story of "Little Red Riding Hood" —in any of its popularised versions, whether it is the Brothers Grimm's or Perrault's— will prove its many points of contact with the story in *Heroes and Villains*.

The popular “Little Red Riding Hood” is the story of a young girl who sets out into the forest, in itself a place redolent with sexual connotations, wearing a red hood. The symbolism of the red hood is clear for Bruno Bettelheim, who argues that red “is the color symbolizing violent emotions, very much including sexual ones” (Bettelheim 1991 [1975]: 173). Thus the girl in the forest is made to confront her fears and her desires, personified in the shape of the wolf, “the seducer” in Bettelheim’s analysis of the tale (Bettelheim 1991 [1975]: 172). The story of Red Riding Hood, therefore, is extraordinarily akin to Marianne’s, save for the hunter, who, in Carter’s text does not have an equivalent figure. This is another interesting point for, deprived of the protection of the good, paternal hunter, Carter’s particular “Little Red Riding Hood” has to put her brains—and her body—to work in order to save herself from the dangerous magnetic field that the wolf’s—Jewel’s—body promises.

Fairy-tale imagery reverberates throughout the novel. Possibly the clearest instance would be the repeated use of warning tales that Marianne has to listen to during her early life and, thereafter, during her stay in Barbarian land. “If you’re not a good girl, the Barbarians will eat you,” (HV 2) Marianne’s nurse admonishes. Here, the nurse, a figure on a par with the Granny in the tale of “Little Red Riding Hood”, indoctrinates the child to be at all times aware of the dangers of the world outside, which are epitomised in the—as yet—mysterious figure of the Barbarians *en masse*. Like most warning tales, what the reader finds here is, rather than advice against the dangers outside, a need to control the real danger that can come from inside the young girl, most of all when she begins to explore the nuances of her own desire. As the girl grows older, the warning tales become more and more

graphic: “that is the nature of the Barbarians ... They wrap little girls in clay just like they do with hedgehogs, wrap them in clay, bake them in the fire and gobble them up with salt. They relish tender little girls,” Marianne’s nurse admonishes, yet again (HV 2). The primeval fear of being devoured is a motif upon which “Little Red Riding Hood” is also articulated. A few pages later in the novel, which correspond to a few years later in Marianne’s life, the tale of the nurse has become, if anything, picturesquely sadistic: “[The Barbarians] slit the bellies of the women after they’ve raped them and sew up cats inside” (HV 10). “If you leave the path, the wolves will gobble you up,” Granny chided, anticipating the nurse’s foreboding discourse. So much for trying to provoke distress in the girls’ minds, for both Red Riding Hood and Marianne become eager to meet wolves and Barbarians.

3.5 In Barbarianland

“Oh wonder! How many goodly creatures are there here!
How beauteous mankind is! Oh brave new world,
That has such people in ‘t!” —Miranda in *The Tempest*, V, i, 182-185

“The thing to remember about [Barbarians] is, they don’t think —Mrs Green in *Heroes and Villains*, 38

There seems to be no escape from warning tales, and all cultures are, apparently, prone to them. This is a discovery that Marianne makes when she leaves the Professors and finds herself in Jewel’s civilisation. The girl is shocked to discover that Barbarian boys also have to hear an amalgam of warning tales, especially those concerning Professor girls. The tribe repeatedly make the “sign of the evil eye” (HV 6) to protect themselves against Marianne. With this, Carter shows that myth is not the prerogative of a certain culture or of a certain group of

people but, rather, myth, as the epigraph drawing on Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville* reminds the reader before the novel begins, "pervades the whole world" becoming "Legend" (HV epigraph page). It is when Marianne hears Jewel say "[o]nce bitten, twice shy" (HV 30), after an adder has bitten her, that she suddenly realises that he is using exactly the same words her nurse used. Thus Marianne and the reader embark on a discovery that will conclude in the knowledge that the two communities, the Professors and the Barbarians, may not be that different, especially if they are ruled by the same kind of admonishing folklore. The striking feature, however, is that far from uniting them, this sharing of folklore is precisely what keeps the two communities apart, for the warning tales are always directed at keeping the other at bay.

It is not precisely the points of contact between the two civilisations that the novel stresses but, rather, the cultural issues that differentiate them. One of the clearest ways in which Professors and Barbarians seem to form two irreconcilable blocks is through their different attire. The Professors, on the one hand, are all for austerity, their choice for mostly dark colours reveals the rationality which permeates all their cultural expressions; the Barbarians, however, like to don bright colours and to finish off their attires by recurring to bracelets, necklaces, earrings and countless other fanciful, extravagant paraphernalia. The garments of the two groups, therefore, 'mark' them in extreme, opposing ways. Barbarians 'are' Barbarians only because they 'look like' Barbarians: "[f]ear is their major weapon, so they need to get themselves up to look like nothing on earth, not men at all" (HV 65). The power of masquerade comes a long way, even for Mrs Green, a Worker woman who one day abandoned the society of the Professors for a

Barbarian. Mrs Green clings obsessively to her older clothes, refusing to wear fur, in order to retain her previous identity as a worker and thus detach herself from the community, to position herself as different, and thus to advertise her presumed situation of superiority amongst the tribe members.¹¹

The differing ways in which the two communities deploy the use of the masquerade are an accurate way of distinguishing them. Another is their different conceptions of time:

If time was frozen among the Professors, here [in the Barbarian community] [Marianne] lost the very idea of time, for the Barbarians did not segment their existence into hours nor even morning, afternoon and evening but left it raw in original shapes of light and darkness so the day was a featureless block of action and night of oblivion. (HV 41)

The Barbarians, therefore, might be deemed 'primitive' in their denial to live their existence according to a thoroughly aleatory segmentation of days into hours. As they are ruled simply by "original shapes of light and darkness" (HV 41), their biological clocks flow according to the rhythms of nature in ways that the Professors' do not. The obsessive differentiation between 'Time' and 'time' is clearly pursued throughout the novel, and it finds an interesting emblem in the dead wrist watch that a Barbarian girl wears on her arm as if it was a mere bracelet: "... it was a little corpse of time, having stopped for good at ten to three one distant and forgotten day" (HV 44).

In her article "Women's Time," originally written in 1979, Julia Kristeva provides us with a vocabulary to understand how and why 'Time' may be

understood as yet another mark of civilisation. Kristeva's article, which is included in Toril Moi's *The Kristeva Reader* (1986), begins with a definition of different identities and how they are structured within different notions of time; namely, linear, monumental, and cyclical. 'Linear' time, according to Kristeva, refers to the human place within 'history' and it can determine an obsessive notion of time in so far as it has the potential to make slaves of human beings. This notion of time finds its opposite in 'monumental' time, which is 'eternal', due to its connection with modes of reproduction and representation such as maternity which, although culturally specific, are also a 'universalised' experience. Finally, 'cyclical' time is particularly related to female subjectivity, as, Kristeva argues:

There are cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature and imposes a temporality whose stereotyping may shock, but whose regularity and unison with what is experienced as extra-subjective time, cosmic time, occasion vertiginous visions and unnameable *jouissance*. (Moi 1986: 191, italics in original)

In Kristeva's words, apart from "cycles", "gestation", and "bio-rhythms" (1986: 191), there is also a great amount of pleasure —"*jouissance*"— involved in cyclical time. It would be interesting to highlight here that *jouissance*, a term which does not have a direct translation in English, is a form of pleasure which Lacan described as exclusive to women.¹² Thus, cyclical time is also related to experiences exclusive to the female subject, such as menstruation.

It is not so much that the Barbarians have "lost the very idea of time" (HV 41), as the above quote initially stated for, after all, in the words of Carter, "[t]here

is no way out of Time” (Carter 1979 SW: 110). It is precisely through the Kristevan cyclical time that Barbarian society rules itself, which is specifically shown in the references to the ways in which the members of the tribe are ruled only by their ‘biological clocks’ and a primeval notion of flowing. Their status as ‘marginal subjects’ —subjects outside the boundaries of Cartesian rationalism— connects them to cyclical time for, as Kristeva argues, although related to female experiences, this conception of time is by no means a prerogative of the female, but shared by all marginal sections of society. In this way, it can likewise be argued that ‘savages’ —ex centrics— know nothing of (linear) Time. Friday does not wear a watch, nor does he need one, whereas Crusoe can hardly keep up with the ‘primitive’ knowledge of learning what time it is by glancing at the sky. In Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs Ramsay, the ‘primeval’ mother figure is portrayed as possessing this ancestral, semi-magical quality of knowing what time it is simply by looking at her garden, whereas Mr Ramsay, the rational father, cannot let go of his almost fetishised watch that he keeps checking obsessively. Rationality and intuition are at opposed poles in Woolf’s novel, and the way in which these two standpoints experience Time/time is one of the premises on which the two can be dichotomised. In *Heroes*, the differing perceptions of Time/time amongst Professor and Barbarian folk also allow the reader —and Marianne, as has been seen— to dichotomise and understand the way in which the two societies function. It is also, on the other hand, the opposing manner in which the two societies experience the notion of ‘time’ which grants them their status within the post-nuclear universe created by the novel. In this respect, Barbarians are positioned —from Marianne’s

Professor perspective— as ‘Others’ also due to their peculiar disrespect for traditional notions of Time.

The notion of Time/time returns towards the end of the novel, where “[p]rominent among the minarets, spires and helmets of wrought iron which protruded from the waters is an enormous clock whose hands stood still at the hour of ten” (HV 138). This is a vision tinted with nostalgic overtones, itself reinforced by the feeling that it will never be possible to know whether the clock stopped at ten in the morning or ten in the evening. After all, the mere notion of time itself is here portrayed as relative.

3.5.1 Intellectual Totalitarianism: Dr. Donally

“Perhaps my father was right,” Marianne pines, “perhaps chaos is even more boring than order” (HV 82). And so it is, when one moves from one pole to its opposite the way Marianne has done. Mikhail Bakhtin would argue that Barbarian society is ‘carnavalesque’ in so far as it is a subversive overturning of (Professor) law and social norms.¹³ Still, there is a feature of the Carnival that Barbarians conform to in more accurate ways, and it is that of parody. Indeed, these “hobgoblins of nightmare” (HV 5) could be read as a parody of the established order of the Professors. Hence, this ‘new place’ that Marianne has discovered is no more than the dark side of the moon, *terra incognita* that ceases to be exotic and titillating once it has been explored, possibly because, without its opposite, it may be devoid of meaning.

The exploration of the Barbarian land and its social structures, however, takes over three quarters of the story under inspection, probably because research



on the Freudian *id* might be much more complicated than that on the 'rational' self. Moreover, although the Barbarian world is initially presented as an alternative to the rigid Professorial social structures, it soon proves inappropriate as such. There are two characters amongst the Barbarians who are presented as faultlines within this alternative, 'natural' society.¹⁴ These are Dr. Donally and Mrs Green, both renegades of Professorial social structures, and both inhabiting a no-man's-land of sorts within the tribal structure.

Donally is an ambiguous figure in so far as he represents, in manner and clothes, a philosopher-cum-preacher-cum-guru. And yet, far from trying to live according to ideals of equality and liberty which his circumstances would initially propose, he is eager to implant a totalitarian system in which he is at the apex of a pyramid, much like a supreme patriarchal Head.

The first description of Donally points to his general ambiguity: "[h]e was a huge man, well over six feet tall, with black hair frizzed out in a cloud down to his shoulders and a scanty, double-pointed beard dyed scarlet on one side and purple on the other" (HV 12). Not only is Donally an extravagant philosopher, but he also adopts paraphernalia distinctive of twentieth-century underground movements. A quote from Carter's essay collection *Nothing Sacred* (1982) will possibly serve to clarify this point. In "Notes for a Theory of Sixties Style", Carter tells us how "[t]he Hell's Angels and the other Californian motor-cycle gangs deck themselves with iron crosses, Nazi helmets, necklets and earrings, *they grow their hair to their shoulders and dye their beards green, red and purple*" (Carter 1982 NS: 88, my italics). If apparel is complex amongst urban tribes, it becomes increasingly heterogeneous when one has to masquerade as transcendental guru amongst the

herds. Donally's guise at Marianne and Jewel's wedding, which he officiates as preacher, is no less baffling:

He was perched on the altar like a grotesque bird. He had donned a mask of carved wood painted with blue, green, purple and black blotches, dark red spots and scarlet streaks which covered all his face but for the bristling part-coloured beard. He was robed from head to foot in a garment woven from the plumage of birds. (HV 71)

Donally may be "mad", as Jewel describes him (HV 27), but he is certainly not stupid and he knows that if he is to exert power amongst the visually-oriented Barbarians, he will have to look more impressive than they do themselves which is an obviously challenging task. After all, when he is in the privacy of his room, he chooses to dress as a Professor by wearing "a neat, dark suit, a white shirt and a black tie, no talismans or jewellery at all, no fur or feathers" (HV 61). Again, Donally and his continuous changes of attire demonstrate that the power of masquerade goes a long way.

Donally's paraphernalia is of special use in his 'public' appearances. The Doctor, after all, is completely bent on power, and for him, "the passion to be reckoned upon is fear" (HV 63). The quote, unacknowledged in the text, is from Hobbes' *Leviathan*, and the old man aims it at Marianne as if he were wielding a weapon, in the hopes that it will inspire the young girl with what he describes as "ambition" (HV 63). Needless to say, his design irremediably fails.

It is in the figure of Donally that Carter offers the clearest critique of the patriarchal symbolic to be found throughout the novel. Her depiction of the Doctor's thirst for power via social manipulation and brute force, thus creating a

reign of fear, stands as a more bitter social comment than the one found in the more obviously tyrannical society of the Professors. Even Mrs Green dares so much as to say that “it’s be hell with your Dr Donally running everything, real hell, no respect for the old or nothing. Only tortures, mutilations and displays of magic” (HV 39). Should Donally rule the roost, then, there is a strong likelihood that all the tribe would probably be treated the way his own son is.

The so-called “child of chaos” (HV 116) is thought to be an idiot, a “half-wit” (HV 47), by everyone except for Marianne, who argues that the boy is “no more of an idiot than anyone would be who had always been kept tied up on the end of a chain” (HV 67). Her observation rings true, for not only is the boy tied like a dog, he also has to eat from a bowl, he has to stand physical abuse and he is repeatedly told he has “disgusting habits” by his father (HV 49). Still, as Marianne argues, the boy is no idiot, as the reader can feel when he ironically tells the young woman that if his father keeps him chained it is precisely out of fear, as he “can have better fits than [Donally] does” (HV 114), thus anticipating the faultlines inherent to Donally’s ideology.

Donally’s position of authority within the tribe is maintained in so far as he stands as absolute master of any discursive practices. Certainly, he is the literary impersonation of the all-powerful Lacanian father figure who, in the theory of the French psychoanalyst, has the potential to break up the dyadic unity between mother and child through his prohibition of a much desired incest. The break is inflicted through what Lacan calls the Name of the Father, the *nom du père* (Lacan 1977: 4), for the father’s authoritative interference locates the child within the social scaffold. Lacan wittily uses the word *nom*, indistinguishable, in French, from

non when it is spoken. This is an effective pun, in so far as the father figure is presented, first and foremost, as authoritative and repressive, as the one who has absolute power to deny access to the maternal figure—to say ‘no’ (*non*). Together with this authoritarian paternal intervention and the primordial recognition of the subject into a somewhat polemical metaphorical mirror through the *stade du miroir*, the subject is propelled from the Imaginary into the Symbolic realm. The Symbolic, within the Lacanian economy, is also the domain of language and representation, so that the ‘I’ adopts “the armour of an alienating identity” (Lacan 1977: 4). Thus the repressive father is a character with discursive power, one who uses language as a subject—hence also Lacan’s choice for the word *nom*, which points to the related fact that naming is the basis of representation.

Donally, as a somewhat incomplete rendering of the Lacanian father, is in constant need to prove his discursive skills, which he does by scribbling graffiti on the walls in the hopes that Marianne, the only other person in the tribe who can read, will make something out of the enigmatic messages they contain. Impersonating William Blake and his inclination for edicts, Donally scribbles, one after another, the messages he wants to communicate to Marianne. Hence, she reads that “BOREDOM IS THE HANDSOME SON OF PRIDE” (HV 46), or that “ONENESS WITH DESTINY GIVES STYLE AND DISTINCTION” (HV 58), or even that “I THINK, THEREFORE, I EXIST; BUT IF I TAKE TIME OFF FROM THINKING, WHAT THEN?” (HV 98), in a challenging somersault from the Cartesian motto.

Far from effecting any change in the young woman, the discursive power in the shape of graffiti confirm Donally as a “charlatan” in her mind (HV 60). It is

highly probable that, having escaped from the Professorial society as indeed she has done, Marianne has had her share of empty words and void messages. After all, Donally, a surrogate parental figure, is no better than Marianne's biological father, in so far as he also fails to see the sterility of the message that he is trying to convey. Donally's graffiti in a community in which the only other person who can read is not interested are as barren as the book Marianne's father was writing but nobody would be reading. Again, the effectiveness of a message is seen to rely exclusively on the interest of the receiver. Likewise, the card that he produces by way of flashy introduction, on which Marianne can read "Dr. F. R. Donally PhD" in Gothic letters (HV 49) falls short as a sign of presumed status when it is carried amongst illiterate folk. Even his wit at perceiving the extraordinary analogy that Marianne's story has with that of Shakespeare's Miranda is only perceived by Marianne herself who, far from revelling in the beauties of postmodern intertextuality, would, no doubt, rather not have been raped by the beautiful Caliban that Jewel represents.

If discourse no longer proves a powerful sign amongst post-nuclear, illiterate, visually-oriented societies, what does? Donally, the "mad" scientist, has thought of all possibilities in order not to make power stray into unwanted, careless hands, thereby reaching the conclusion that another icon had to be found and made to bridge the gap.

He finds this in the cult of *viperus berus*, the snake. According to Voloshinov, a member of the Bakhtin circle, a meaning can be constructed out of a large number of the material objects and artifacts that surround us. These may be made to carry a given meaning through providing them with the adequate ideology:

“[w]henever a sign is present, ideology is present, too. *Everything ideological possesses semiotic value*” (Voloshinov 1930: 10, italics in original).

Through the cult of the semiotically-charged snake, which, quite significantly, reaches its peak during the decadent wedding ceremony in which Jewel and Marianne get married, Donally creates and sustains a power structure based on a ritual and tradition of his own making. Through years of systematic reading of Hobbes, Teilhard de Chardin, Lévi-Strauss, and Durkheim, among others, the Doctor has come to the conclusion that “[r]eligion is a device for instituting a sense of a privileged group” (HV 63). Being part of that privileged group involves the logical consequence of idolising its presumed leader; in the present case, himself.

This is an ideology akin to the Elisabethan version of Donally which can be found in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (c. 1610), Prospero. Donally is eager to lay bare the parallelisms between Marianne and Miranda, as aforementioned, but he hopelessly fails to observe how he has become a postmodern—in the sense of parodic—version of the patriarchal figure that Prospero represents. Where Prospero is portrayed as mastering magic powers, Donally is only ‘trying’ to make Barbarians ‘believe’ that he has supernatural powers. Prospero’s magic institutes a ‘prosperous’ social order on the island where he, together with Miranda, is castaway. His good nature has also been paramount in the education of the young maiden:

PROSPERO: Here in this island we arrived; and here

Have I, thy schoolmaster, made thee more profit

Than other princesses can, that have more time

For vainer hours, and tutors not so careful.

MIRANDA: Heavens thank you for 't! (I, ii, 171-175)

In clear opposition to this display of education, Donally's attempts at magic only bring about more chaos and its logical consequence: a general lack of prosperity for the Barbarians. When asked by Marianne as to why he never taught Jewel to read, Donally answers: "[s]elf-defence, in the first instance, [...] On the second count, I wanted to maintain him in a crude state of unrefined energy" (HV 62). Donally cannot even aspire to the status of Prospero's 'Other', the witch Sycorax, for although her magic appears to have been of a black nature, at least she could exercise it.

There is an obvious danger in Donally's blind faith in the power of paraphernalia, simulacra, and the sign. If the sign is obliterated, the identity that was based on it will also be reduced to nothing. This is precisely what happens when Donally is turned out of the tribe by Jewel. Even though he refuses to leave quietly and curses Jewel and his family-to-be in the manner of the best bad witch in any fairy tale — "[Marianne] shall have a vile childbed culminating in a monstrous birth," he cries (HV 130)— the narrative voice mocks his sudden wickedness by stating that "[I]ighting should have flashed but did not" (HV 130). In the most absolute decadence, even the elements seem to fail Donally.

The worst of fates awaits the fallen guru and, as Jewel tells him, once the snake and all his other bits —including books, drugs, mask and impressive feather cloak— are thrown into the river, it will be as if he had never existed. With the Lacanian powerful father banished from the equation, Marianne can start concentrating on the way to becoming the visible head of the tribe (HV 131).

3.5.2 Emotional Totalitarianism: Mrs Green

If snake, books, drugs, mask and feather cloak determine Donally's identity as guru, the "green dress" (HV 14) proves to be the main marker of Mrs Green's, so much so in fact, that even her name, the main marker of her identity, derives from it. The dress is also a mark of her former social status amongst the Professors, where only Workers wear green. Even though now, in Barbarian society, the dress has lost its semiotic charge as a sign of status, Mrs Green is still allowed to enjoy certain commodities, such as a room of her own and a personal chamber pot (HV 36). One is not certain whether these commodities are granted because of her former status or because for years she was the partner of a Barbarian, whose children she also bore.

Apart from the green dress, Mrs Green adheres also to a few treasures of her former life, relics the most interesting of which is a copy of Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*. Paradoxically, the novel is of little use to her now, as she has forgotten how to read. However, were Mrs Green able to read Dickens, she might be able to notice the exciting, yet subtle, parallelisms that the Dickensian tale has with *Heroes and Villains*.

Although not a Gothic novel *per se*, *Great Expectations* (1861) contains a few chapters which make interesting use of the Gothic mode. These are mainly the chapters featuring Miss Havisham, a figure who is of some relevance to Carter's novel. To start with, the wedding dress that Marianne is forced to wear during her

wedding ceremony with Jewel is as shabby as the one Miss Havisham refuses to take off in Dickens' novel. Although I will go back to this wedding garment when I deal with the figure of Marianne, attention to the description of it in the text will prove the extent to which it becomes fetishised as a manifestation of Marianne's distress about her present situation:

The dress had a satin bodice, now fissured with innumerable fine cracks; long, tight, white sleeves that came to a point over the backs of the hands and an endless skirt of time-yellowed tulle. There was a vast acreage of net veil and a small garland of artificial pearls. Most of the pearl coating had detached itself from the surfaces so they were now only little globes of white glass. [...] There were shadows of mildew in every fold of the voluminous skirt and all smelled musty and stale. (HV 67-68)

The narrative voice here is at pains to demonstrate that there is something deeply uncanny about a wedding dress which has already been worn, probably because the garment is supposed to be new, a subtle symbol, in turn, of the fact that the bride is a virgin. The uncanny nature of this image is obviously based on a cultural fabrication related to the deeply-rooted sexist idea that the bride has to be immaculate and prepared for the groom. Likewise, a great part of the effect of decay that Miss Havisham emanates in Dickens' novel comes from the unconscious impact that the notion of an older woman in a wedding dress has on both Pip and the reader of Dickens, as the following quote shows:

[Miss Havisham] was dressed in rich materials –satins, and lace, and silks- all of white. Her shoes were white. And she had a long white veil

dependent from her hair, and she had bridal flowers in her hair, *but her hair was white*. [...] I saw that everything within my view which ought to be white, had been white *long ago, and had lost its lustre, and was faded and yellow*. I saw that the bride within the bridal dress *had withered like the dress*, and like the flowers, and had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes. I saw that the dress had been put upon the rounded figure of a young woman, and that *the figure upon which it now hung loose, had shrunk to skin and bone*. [...] Now, *wax-work and skeleton* seemed to have dark eyes that moved and looked at me. I should have cried out, if I could. (Dickens 1993 [1861]: 56-57, my italics)¹⁵

Although different in nature, there is also something perverse in a young woman wearing a used wedding dress, as the case of Marianne shows. Melanie, the protagonist of *The Magic Toyshop*, referred to at the beginning of this section, also falls into the trap of putting on her mum's wedding dress in order to fantasise about her own 'perfect day':

Melanie was trapped, a mackerel in a net; the veil blew up around her, blinding her eyes and filling her nostrils. [...] The dress was very heavy. The sliding satin had a sheen on it like that on the silver teapot which never went out of the drawing-room cabinet except to be polished. All the moonlight in the room focussed on its rich and mysterious folds. [...] It was too big. [...] Two skinny Melanies could have worn the dress between them for a Siamese-twin bridal. (Carter 1967: 15)

The metaphor of entrapment, “a mackerel in a net” (Carter 1967: 15), is evident in so far as it goes beyond the ensnaring within the veil which, literally and metaphorically, blinds Melanie’s eyes and restricts her breathing.

In this particular instance, the dress represents, if anything, a menace. Indeed, Melanie’s untimely ‘coming of age’, “[i]t was too big” (Carter 1967: 15), together with her improper usurpation of the mother’s place, serve as foreboding of the terrible tragedy that is about to happen in her life which will prevent her from continuing to fantasise about romance, in a sudden, brutal establishment of the reality principle: her parents die in a plane crash and she and her brother have to move to the sinister Uncle Philips’s house. On another, more general, level the scene anticipates the motif of the double: “[t]wo skinny Melanies could have worn the dress between them for a Siamese-twin bridal” (Carter 1967: 15), which will play a crucial role throughout the novel, anticipating Carter’s interest in the issue of the multiplicity of identity.

The two wedding-dress scenes —Marianne’s and Melanie’s— acquire enormous and dreadful importance within the narrative, and the reader is led to interpret the apparel as a powerful, prophetic sign. Although this is not the case in Dickens’ novel, where Miss Havisham’s modelling the bridal garment merely contributes to increasing the atmosphere of decadence also present throughout Satis House and its gardens, the reference to *Great Expectations* is relevant here.

Intertextuality with Dickens’ novel goes beyond the use of common metaphors and symbols, of which the wedding dress is just an example. As argued above, the use of time is an interesting point in Carter’s novel. So much so, in fact, that it could be argued that Time/time is yet another character in the text.

Likewise, in *Satis House*, we are told, all the clocks were stopped at precisely the time in which Miss Havisham's groom failed to make his appearance, twenty minutes to nine (Dickens 1993 [1861]: 57). Miss Havisham is, therefore, stuck in time, both physically and psychologically, almost, but not quite, as if she was living in Professorland. Her refusal to move in with the times, as it were, is related to her masochistic pleasure in the constant re-enactment of the moment of great expectations, which anticipates, for a few minutes, the moment of her greatest frustration. Likewise, in *Carter*, the symbol of the wedding dress functions through a similar paradox: it is commonly associated with a moment of (great) expectations for women, but wearing it brings about a state of bafflement.

Both Pip and Marianne, on the other hand, make ample and interesting use of time in their way towards personal growth, yet another parallelism between *Great Expectations* and *Heroes and Villains*. The two novels are related to the mode of the *Bildungsroman* in their tracing of the physical and psychological development of the main character. Pip communicates directly with the reader, for he is both the narrator and the focaliser of the story he is telling, whereas Marianne relies on a narrative voice which, nevertheless, is heavily marked by her own perspective. Thus the two novels, therefore, make subtle but sophisticated use of focalisation to communicate their stories to the readers.

One wonders whether Mrs Green would appreciate all these delicate references to the novel that she has kept in her drawer for so many years, especially when she is precisely the one who helps Marianne with the heavy wedding dress in a scene which clearly positions the older woman as a surrogate mother. This representation of Mrs Green is further pursued by subsequent moments in the

narrative, where Marianne herself is washed by contradictory waves of affection for and anger against the old woman, as if the latter was, indeed, her own mother:

'My mother always loved my brother best,' [Marianne] said vaguely to Mrs Green who stood beside her staring at the fire with a face furrowed by unguessable worries. Marianne moved closer to her for comfort, though she did not know how Mrs Green could comfort her except by the repetition of certain old saws about human behaviour which might or might not any longer have application. (HV 77)

Although a highly necessary figure in the narrative, due to her position as both reflection and contrast to Marianne, Mrs Green is far from original. She can be effectively inscribed, for instance, in the tradition of a thousand Nelly Dean types who appear in a number of texts as a conglomerate of the good fairy and the witch, the two opposites which accompany the heroines of fairy tales in their adventures. As such, Mrs Green's role within the narrative is related to leading the young protagonist on her way to constructing her identity, although at the same time, she effectively curtails the freedom of her younger counterpart, for fear that she may stray too far.

Mrs Green, just like other 'mother-surrogate' figures, among which Emily Brontë's Nelly Dean stands as the primordial example, displays an ambivalent attitude towards Marianne. This arouses equally ambivalent feelings in the reader, who is not sure whether she is introduced in the text as a soothing element or simply to torment the female protagonist. Surrogate mothers are, therefore, strongly 'Freudian' in so far as, just like the original M/other that Freud depicted, they are a source of pleasure on the one hand —for they satisfy the child's most

primary desires and needs— and pain on the other hand —in so far as they are responsible for abandoning the child to the dissatisfactions of ‘culture’.¹⁶

In her article on Carter’s fiction entitled “From ‘Coded Mannequin’ to Bird Woman: Angela Carter’s Magic Flight” (1987), Paulina Palmer focuses specifically on the issue she labels as ‘sisterhood’ in several novels of the author in question. Thus, she examines, for instance, the matriarchal guerilla fighters in *The Passion of New Eve*, a female community that is depicted through an extremely sardonic eye (Palmer 1987: 190). In *Heroes*, Palmer says, Mrs Green is extremely unsupportive towards Marianne, making no effort to protect her from several attacks, the worst of which would obviously be the attempted gang rape at the hands of Jewel’s brothers, which does not finally take place (Palmer 1987: 191).

Marianne herself describes the older woman’s attitude as “ambivalent” (HV49) when the aforementioned incident of the gang rape is about to happen, and the narrative voice states that Mrs Green “would be distressed but also perhaps *obscurely satisfied* at what would certainly take place” (HV 49, my italics). This ‘obscure satisfaction’ which the narrative voice registers Mrs Green of feeling, however, may stem from issues related to class, rather than to gender. The reader is constantly made aware that Mrs Green still thinks of herself as a Worker woman and, as such, she must feel strangely inferior to a girl who, after all, is of Professorial provenance. Their present decontextualisation —neither of them live among the Professors anymore, where hierarchies were very much upheld— is counteracted by Mrs Green’s refusal to take off her green dress. The garment positions her, in Marianne’s eyes and her own, as a Worker.

Palmer alludes to an episode in the novel under discussion which explores the ambiguity which, according to her, rules all relations between women in Carter. In the said episode, Marianne is ordered by Jewel to kiss his cousin Annie. Although she performs as ordered by Jewel, she does so with extreme misgivings, for she thinks that she is in danger of picking up an infection from the sick baby that Annie has in her arms. Palmer deems it “ironic” that this intimate contact between the two women should be performed at the command of a man (1987: 193). After kissing Annie, Marianne suddenly starts weeping, and her tears are tasted by the tribal woman:

Her tears splashed on Annie’s cheek. Annie touched them with her finger and then licked her finger to see if they were salt enough. Marianne slid down to her knees, sobbing as if her heart was breaking. Annie pushed the girl away and turned her back on her with a sigh. (HV 104)

Although for Palmer, this represents “a physical act of communication between the two women” (1987: 193), she hurriedly points out that this constitutes an isolated episode in the novel.

In my view, Palmer’s argumentation fails to appreciate the countless episodes of both verbal and non-verbal communication and intimacy which occur between Mrs Green and Marianne and which, although effectively charged with ambivalence, as argued above, are also coloured by ironic overtones. This is especially perceptible, for instance, in the scene in which the two women sardonically discuss the wedding dress: “[o]h, it [the wedding dress] will make an impression,” Mrs Green says, “it’s the kind of thing they think the Professors wear

in the privacy of their own homes, you know” (HV 68). There is a strong connection here between Mrs Green and Marianne, one which is based on the fact that the two women share a place of origin. There is certainly a subtext of ‘us’ — who know Professors do not wear bridal garments at home— versus ‘them’ — who will naively believe that they do. This subtext is present throughout their exchanges, and it proves an unspoken, yet very effective, bond between the two women.

For Palmer, “it is not, in fact, until Carter’s recently published texts that this heterosexist bias disappears and is replaced by a positive representation of relationships between women” (1987: 195). Palmer is here referring to such texts as *Night at the Circus*, where the female protagonist, Fevvers, is always in the faithful company of her mother surrogate, the ex-prostitute Lizzie. Nevertheless, I disagree once more with Palmer’s approach to ‘sisterhood’ in Carter’s novels.

It is true that the later novels deal with relations between women in quite a different way from the earlier texts. It is also in *Nights at the Circus* that Carter introduces a lesbian relationship which turns out to be very satisfying for the two parts involved, the Princess of Abyssinia and Mignon. However, ‘sisterhood’ or ‘woman-oriented’ relationships, not necessarily of a sexual nature, had been present in different guises, from the very first stages of the author’s production.

The difference between these and the ones we find in *Nights at the Circus* may have more to do with the way in which these relationships are explored. A quote from *The Magic Toyshop* may summarise these early representations of ‘sisterhood’: “An ancient, female look passed between [Margaret and Melanie]; they were poor women pensioners, planets round a male sun” (Carter 1967: 140).

Aunt Margaret and Melanie in *The Magic Toyshop* are emotional slaves of Uncle Philip's unrestrained tendency towards psychological abuse. It is the common experience of male abuse in this case which unites the two women to the point that the "ancient, female look" (Carter 1967: 140) passes between them. Likewise, in *Heroes*, it is the feeling of being subject to abuse at the hands of men—be it Jewel, Dr Donally, or any others—that connects Mrs Green and Marianne. It would obviously be much more satisfactory were the connection not spurred by such infamous experiences but, ultimately, what the readers find in these instances is none other than 'sisterhood', to use Palmer's terminology to refer to interaction between women.¹⁷

3.5.3 *Terra Incognita* Deconstructed

"Whatever romantic attraction the idea of the Barbarians might have held for [Marianne] as she sat by herself in the white tower, when her father was alive, had entirely evaporated. She was full of pity for them" —Angela Carter, *Heroes and Villains*, 52

Marianne's escapades in Barbarianland turn out to be as essentially dissatisfying as her life amongst the Professors. The Barbarians that she first met as a little girl, the ones who looked like "hobgoblins of nightmare" (HV 5), are not as glamorous, seductive or even terrifying upon closer inspection. Once the mask has fallen, Marianne discovers, much to her chagrin, that:

The thin mattresses, stuffed with leaves, hay, straw or wool, must engender gigantic colonies of bugs; the flowing Barbarians coiffures, clogged at the roots with lice, now seemed wilfully perverse

accessories and when she saw warrior garments hanging limply from nails hammered into the walls, she almost laughed to see the fragile shells of such poorly founded terror. The children suffered promiscuously from ringworm, skin diseases and weeping eye. Also rickets. She considered the possibility of deficiency diseases such as pellagra and beri-beri. When she thought of the noble savage in her father's researches, her distaste was mixed with grief. (HV 45)

The Barbarians are naive in their unconditional belief in the power of simulacra and masquerade. As little as a close look by a Professor girl will be enough to dismantle the frightful feigned identity they have constructed on this belief. The disguise of Barbarianism gone, Marianne finds nothing where human faces should have been. This idea is articulated to its ultimate consequences through the character of Jewel, which will be the main object of study of the next chapter.

Notes

¹ My assertion that the violence in *Heroes* may be deemed more 'extreme' than the one found in *The Magic Toyshop* does not correspond to viewing the latter novel as devoid of violence. An example of the covert psychological violence at work in *The Magic Toyshop* may be found in the scene in which Melanie is forced to act as Leda for the voyeuristic pleasure of her sadistic uncle in the puppet show of his own making, and which is a version of the myth of "Leda and the Swan" (chapter 8).

² *Heroes and Villains* is not the only text where the reader's initial expectations are deconstructed, even shattered. As argued in the previous section of this study, Carter cunningly manipulates a number of popular tales in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979), whereby a similar process of defamiliarisation takes place. At one level or another, this is common practice throughout Carter's writing.

³ All subsequent quotes from this text have been taken from the 1969 Penguin edition. For the sake of clarity, they will be marked HV within the body of the text.

⁴ For a list of these collections, amongst which there is the work of Lorna Sage, Sarah Gamble, Aidan Day, and Joseph Bristow, see the **Works Cited** section in this study.

⁵ For discussion on the publication of feminist utopias, see Chapter 1, "The Grotesque Utopia: Joanna Russ, Jeanette Winterson, Angela Carter, Jane Palmer and Monique Wittig" in Lucie Armitt's *Contemporary Women's Fiction and the Fantastic* (2000), pp. 15-38. For full publication details, see the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

⁶ The fact that Atwood's novel was adapted for the cinema with some success might also have helped to increase the popularity of the text.

⁷ Bertha Mason has extensively been read as Jane's repressed side by the Gilbert-and-Gubar school of thought, an argument that is solid in so far as both Bertha and Jane are seen as icons rather than as mere characters. Jane Eyre's iconicity, however, is something that Charlotte Brontë's novel is at pains to demonstrate, for she is an active and intelligent woman searching for a subjective 'autonomy' as opposed to a typical Romantic heroine searching for mere 'romance'. In this respect she has a point of contact with Elizabeth Bennet, the heroine of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1916). Still, the process by which Bertha is forced to become Jane Eyre's narratological 'Other' allows Jane to position herself as supreme subject within Brontë's text.

⁸ A further development of the androgyne would be the figure of the cyborg, as described by Donna Haraway in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (1991). Reference to Haraway's text and its proposal has already been made in the Preliminaries II section of the present study. For full publication details, see the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

⁹ Angela Carter re-deploys this cliché in her short story "The Erl King," which is included in her volume *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*. In the text, the author explores women's contradictory feeling of fear and desire to become incarcerated in the gaze of the male lover by presenting a situation in which the Erl King of the title has the power to transform young women into birds. These are, in turn, caged in the hut which the Erl King has in the woods. The equation of women with birds has left its imprint in popular language, the word 'bird' is slang for 'woman' in British English.

¹⁰ The manipulation of time and point of view in order to achieve climactic moments in the narration is obviously not new. This technique was widely used already in medieval times in order to keep the attention of the audience who were listening to long romances, such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. A very good example of the deployment of this in the medieval romance can be found in the scene where the Green Knight appears in King Arthur's castle and brings the Christmas banquet and the merrymaking to an abrupt end with his famous challenge. In stanza 7, the narrator finishes the description of the meal in a somewhat rushed fashion: "Of their meal I shall mention no more just now" (l. 130), as "there heaved in at the hall door an awesome fellow / Who in height outstripped all earthy men" (ll. 136-137). The following stanzas focus on a detailed description of the intruder, by which the audience is dramatically forced to confront him as if they were not just in Camelot, but inside Gawain himself. Considering Carter's degree on Medieval literature, doubtless she was familiar with this text and its narratological devices.

¹¹ The issue of the masquerade will be assessed further on in the present study.

¹² Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose published the essays by Lacan in *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne* in 1982. The essay entitled "God and the *Jouissance* of the Woman" explores the concept of *jouissance* as a phenomenon which exceeds the phallic order and which captures the intensity of sexual experience. For full publication details of Mitchell and Rose's text, see the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

¹³ The issue of the grotesque will be assessed further on in the present study.

¹⁴ Jewel and Marianne, as will be discussed in subsequent sections of this study, would also stand as instances of social faultlines.

¹⁵ Miss Havisham's uncanny characterisation relies heavily on this description. For an interesting study of this Dickensian figure, see "Spectral Stories," by Elizabeth Bronfen in *The Narrative Reader*, edited by Martin McQuillan in 2000 (pp. 192-197). For full publication details, see the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

¹⁶ This is argued by Sigmund Freud in his "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," which he wrote in 1905 and which are included in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (1953-1965). For full publication details, see the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

¹⁷ It could be argued that even the lesbian relationship in *Nights at the Circus*, the one between Mignon and the Princess is seen as an alternative to male abuse of power, for Mignon turns to the Princess after having undergone several humiliations at the hands of her male circus partner, most recently, and others before him.

4. "Nothing but the furious invention of my virgin nights": Jewel in Con-Text

"To someone who asked her what is the most mysterious thing in the world, Phenarete invariably responded, 'I don't know anything in the world more mysterious than desire in its manifestations, its appearances, its disappearances'"
—Monique Wittig & Sande Zeig, *Lesbian Peoples*, 42

"[O]ur disturbing otherness ... is what bursts in to confront that 'demon', that threat, that apprehension generated by the protective apparition of the other at the heart of what we persist in maintaining as a proper, solid 'us'. By recognizing *our* uncanny strangeness we shall neither suffer from it nor enjoy it from the outside. The foreigner is within me, hence we are all foreigners. If I am a foreigner, then there are no foreigners" —Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 1, 191

"Isn't desire always the same whether the object is present or absent? Isn't the object *always* absent?" —Roland Barthes, *Fragments: A Lover's Discourse*, 5

"I'm the cleverest of all the savages," flips Jewel upon meeting Marianne, "[b]ut by no means the kindest" (HV 20). He is quite right too. This section, exclusively devoted to the figure of the beautiful stranger in the shape of an exotic foreigner, will try to demonstrate that Jewel, the clever and unkind savage, represents the collapse of traditional distinctions between 'savagery' and 'civilisation', thereby reaching a conclusion whereby he is presented merely as a phantasy of Marianne's adolescent imagination. One by one, all the (cultural)

identities initially bestowed on Jewel by Marianne and himself, his temporary subject positions which are effectively inscribed in the text —savage, gypsy, Demon Lover, hero, and villain— are shed like snakeskin until he is revealed to be outside any social pattern, a phantasy of the *id*, the Other of desire located exclusively within the Imaginary, “[n]othing but the furious invention of [a girl’s] virgin nights” (HV 137).

4.1 (Ig)noble Savages

“Rousseau spoke of a noble savage but this is a time of ignoble savages” —
Heroes and Villains, 10

So declares Marianne’s father in *Heroes*. From his very first introduction, Jewel classifies himself amongst the “savages”, as his words, which open this chapter, indicate. Following the intertextuality with Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest*, already alluded to when discussing the figure of Donally above, Jewel would initially find an obvious parallel in the primordial Shakespearean savage, the fearful Caliban.

In the list of *dramatis personae* that the Elizabethan playwright includes at the beginning of his play, Caliban is described as simply that, “a savage”. No further information on the character is esteemed necessary for the author. This locution might have probably been put to use in Shakespeare’s time to refer to those peoples who had not experienced ‘civilisation’. Hence, Caliban would initially be seen by Shakespearean audiences as a New World native suddenly overwhelmed by the arrival of European settlers, and no negative preconceptions would formerly be thrown upon his figure through this denomination. In line with

this argument, *The Tempest* obsessively revolves around the myth of the “Golden Age”, as we can see in Gonzalo’s words:

I’ the commonwealth I would by contraries
 Execute all things, for no kind of traffic
 Would I admit; no name of magistrate;
 Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
 And use of service, none; contract, succession,
 Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;
 No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;
 No occupation; all men idle, all;
 And women too, but innocent and pure;
 No sovereignty. (Shakespeare 1985 [1610]: I, ii, 136-148)

This dream of a future “Golden Age” or “commonwealth” that Gonzalo describes would be, for both character and author, a happy, utopian scenario, where there would be “no kind of traffic” (l. 137), “no name of magistrate” (l. 138), “riches” and “poverty” would not be known (l. 139), “no use of metal” (l. 142), and all the men and women would be “idle”, although the latter would have to strive to be “innocent and pure” (l. 146). However, far from being described as naive and good-hearted, as readers would find within the utopian tradition, the savage Caliban is repeatedly portrayed in hostile and negative terms. Prospero, for instance, maintains Caliban’s provenance to be evil: his father was the devil and his mother was a witch (Shakespeare 1985 [1610]: I, ii, 321). Prospero’s daughter, innocent Miranda, describes Caliban as “a villain” she does not “love to look on” (Shakespeare 1985 [1610]: I, ii, 312-313), which is hardly surprising, if the reader

believes her father's accusation that the savage attempted to rape her, which has presumably taken place before the play starts (Shakespeare 1985 [1610]: I, ii, 346-350)

Unlike the characters in his own play, Shakespeare does not seem to be quite so positive about the evil peculiarities of his textual savage. The ambivalent textual attitude towards Caliban is evidenced in so far as the author provides this savage character with some of the most beautiful, poetic, and lyrical lines in the play. Lyricism in the play, therefore, is not exclusive to Caliban's antagonist, the noble spirit, Ariel. Thus, a certain presumed 'nobility' in Caliban is subtly emphasised by Shakespeare, so that the reader may eventually wonder whether the greatest sin of the savage might merely be of a cultural kind: Caliban is indeed unable to learn and demonstrate in his behaviour the 'moral attitudes' which permeate his counterparts, the European citizens who colonise his universe, the island, both unexpectedly and abruptly.¹

The other 'villain', the one that Marianne meets in *Heroes and Villains*, is, at the best of times, quite extraordinary. It would be difficult to discuss Jewel's presumed 'moral attributes' because the context of the novel itself, a post-nuclear world, turns any attempt to discuss 'morality' into a meaningless debate. After all, if there might be a lesson to learn from dystopian narratives, of which *Heroes* is a fine example, it would be the one that states that concepts such as 'right' and 'wrong' have lost their meaning and need profound re-contextualisation. Thus, Jewel's 'morality' is coherent within the context in which he was brought up, the tribal family of Barbarians, even though for Marianne his violent nature is quite divorced from more traditional concepts of 'morality'.

Marianne’s perplexity in relation to the young man is soon experienced, as she discovers that Jewel “talked like a half-educated man” and “this surprised her very much since she had thought the Barbarians possessed no education at all” (HV 26). To a certain extent, *Heroes* toys with Rousseau’s myth of the ‘noble savage’, an observation which coincides with the uncivilised —‘natural’— setting into which Marianne is suddenly propelled after she escapes with her young man. This is a setting which Carter readily presents as a ‘future’ Golden Age minus the ‘Golden’, that is. There is a sense of nostalgia intrinsic to the idea of the ‘Golden Age’ which Shakespeare’s Gonzalo referred to above. Although Gonzalo’s description of his dream of utopia points to a certain, unknown future, the main tenets of the society he is describing evoke a time past —a time when there is no bureaucracy and no use for money, as all the men are idle. The same point could be made about Jewel and the idea of ‘nobility’ that he initially promises, which is based on Rousseau’s myth, although it does not necessarily endorse this myth. It is, precisely, Jewel’s peculiar ‘uncivilised’ education which ignites Marianne’s interest in him. After all, his unpolished wit and his remarkable command of language are constantly being referred to in the text, thus offering the seductive mixture which initially attracts Marianne to the extent of using him as an excuse to emigrate from her home. The point here is that if Jewel were merely presented as a ‘savage’, instead of as the hybrid between ‘savagery’ and ‘civilization’ he is, he would not be as charismatic as he initially seems.²

Very little of ‘noble’ and a lot of ‘savage’ can be perceived in Jewel and his overtly rough ways, which soon poses problems, both for Marianne and readers of the novel. This is how Carter astutely re-directs the myth of the ‘noble

savage' to a pseudo-intellectual arena, as the reader can witness in the exchanges between Professor girl and Barbarian boy. When upon a first face-to-face meeting Marianne snottily states to Jewel that: "the Professors think you have reverted to beasthood [...] You are a perfect illustration of the breakdown of social interaction and the death of social systems", his impermeability comes through with a very scornful: "You don't say" (HV 24). What Carter is doing here through the character of Jewel may be evocative of D.H. Lawrence's earlier portrayal of a game-keeper who, nonetheless, had been educated at Oxford, but with a difference. Lawrence's passionate idealisation of a working-class character, Oliver Mellors as seen in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), is a trap Carter does not fall into. The initial fascination that Jewel's beauty and exoticism—together with the romance he promises—exerts over both Marianne and the reader is subtly deconstructed when he is slowly but inexorably revealed as a cruel individual, that the young woman learns first to despise and finally to pity.

This initial charisma of Jewel is induced precisely by the aura of 'naturalness' which, not only he, but also his brothers display before the Professor eyes of Marianne. In the following extract the reader can hear Marianne's thoughts while she gazes at one of Jewel's brother's, Precious:

His black hair hung down over his cheek, hiding the marks of the tattooing needle, and he twisted his fingers in the black mane of a bay horse and sang a very simple tune to himself [...] The bones had not yet formed an implacable casque beneath the soft flesh of his face and his thin, brown, adolescent legs dangled against the pony's flank negligently. Precious had not finished growing. (HV 64-65)

To Marianne, he looks “as if he had come from the hands of original nature, [...] pure essence of man in its most innocent state, more nearly related to the river than to herself” (HV 65). This sudden ‘vision’ of Precious is undoubtedly inscribed in Rousseau’s earlier fantasy of the ‘essential man’ as he described it in his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality and the Social Contract* (1754). There is an underlying element, however, which cannot be found in Rousseau’s argument whilst it overtly pervades Marianne’s. The evident erotic overtones behind her description of the young man cannot be ignored, by which he becomes commodified as the idea of the ‘natural man’: the “black hair”, the tattoo, the “soft flesh”, the “adolescent legs” and the final allusion to the “pure essence of man” (HV 64-65) create a sub-text of eroticism and sexuality which effectively dismantles Marianne’s ‘professorial’ eye, and make the reader wonder for a moment whether this is not the clichéd description of the main hero in an adolescent romance. This eroticised version of Rousseau’s ‘noble savage’, and its inscription in a textual romance context, stands as yet another subversive reference to further ‘minor’ genres that Carter makes use of in her narrative, together with redeployments of the Gothic mode and the fairy tale, among others, which have already been considered.

One of the concepts that the story under discussion is at pains to deconstruct through the seductive encounter between Jewel and Marianne is that of ‘civilisation’ itself. Even though Marianne originally describes Jewel and all the Barbarians as “a complete anachronism” (HV 56), she does not fail to recognise that he feels at ease within the environment they inhabit, just like Precious in the above quote is “more nearly related to the river than to herself”

(HV 65). In so far as Jewel has the ability to feel at ease and dominate an environment which is overtly hostile to the girl, he is paradoxically presented as much more ‘civilised’ than Marianne, for ‘civilisation’ *per se* is surely related to the level of adjustment to the medium which the creatures inhabiting this medium display. This presents another implicit critique of Rousseau’s myth of the ‘natural man’ as aforementioned. As critic Elaine Jordan has stated, Jewel “displaces Rousseau’s image of the natural man as an isolated individual [...] It is, *contra* Rousseau, the civilised Marianne who is the true isolate” (Sage 1994b: 201). Marianne’s isolation within the tribe is a product of her learned concept of civilisation and the ways in which she displays it, which include the clothes she wears, and her attitude towards the members of the horde, among others. Her inability to ‘read’ Jewel’s and the other Barbarians’ attitudes is an outcome of this learned concept of civilisation. Via her change of context, it is Marianne, not Jewel, who effectively becomes the dislocated foreigner.

4.2 *Hommes Fatales*

“[S]he could no longer set foot outside the compulsive circle, not, at least, tonight, desire it as much as she might. She made a convulsive movement as if in a last self-thwarted attempt to escape his magnetic field but his candle seemed the only light in the shrunken, darkened world” —Angela Carter, *Heroes and Villains*, 96

Marianne’s incompetence to understand Jewel is related to the ambiguous feelings that he arouses in her from his very first interference in her fictional life. The reader shares in her contradictions towards him, due to the fact that the focaliser in the story is Marianne herself, and her unreliable perspective is in constant conflict, due to the strange thread of attraction that this beautiful young

man, whom she knows she should abhor, weaves around her. It is precisely because Jewel is an object of Marianne’s desire that he is presented as an awkward figure. Hence, the girl becomes isolated in the foreign land of her own desire, her narrative thus becoming her attempt to articulate it, learn its language, and understand it.

For Phenarete there is nothing in the world more mysterious than desire, as she states in one of the quotes opening the present chapter. Desire is inherently mysterious in so far as, being outside language and representation, it refuses to be explained. In the case of Marianne, this assertion becomes blatant. Encapsulated within the magnetic field of a man the personality of whom she does not even like, Marianne is washed by successive waves of attraction and repulsion towards him throughout the novel. In this turmoil of contradictory feelings, however, Marianne is not alone. A number of Gothic heroines come to mind: Jane Eyre falls in love with the tortured and secretly-married Mr Rochester, in a relationship which finds an effective symbol and final catharsis in the fire that devastates Rochester’s abode and blinds him at the end of the novel; one wonders whether Catherine Earnshaw’s life, on the other hand, would have been much easier and more placid had she avoided crossing the path of the Demon Lover *par excellence*, the paradoxically attractive Heathcliff.³ The dilemma which Heathcliff’s appearance poses in Catherine’s life —the choice between ‘nature’ and ‘culture’— may be viewed as the cause of her probably self-induced illness, which leads to her death.

A clear disposition towards their status as *hommes fatales* is not the only characteristic that Jewel and Heathcliff share. To begin with, it is interesting to

see how Jewel is repeatedly associated to Marianne's unnamed brother from the first, violent moment that the two boys meet, in which Jewel kills Marianne's brother and she performs as audience, against her will. The vision of the killing of her brother haunts Marianne many years later, and it grows into an obsession to the point that, in her nightmares, her own brother is supplanted by Jewel:

She recalled with visionary clarity the face of the murdering boy with his necklaces, rings and knife, although the memory of her brother's face was totally blurred. Sometimes she dreamed of his death; one day, waking from this dream, she realized the two faces had superimposed themselves entirely on each other and all she saw was the boy killing himself or his double. This recurring dream disturbed her and she awoke sweating, though not precisely with fear. (HV 10)

In a strikingly similar —yet not plainly as violent— metaphor, in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1845), Heathcliff takes the name, and hence the place within the family circle, of a dead child of the Earnshaws, an episode which marks his life as 'dispossessed' in Victorian society, and launches the polemical incest motif between Catherine and Heathcliff within Brontë's narrative.⁴ Carter's allusion to this 'incest motif' is contextualised within a psychoanalytic arena, through the common recourse to dreams. This launches a dynamics by which Jewel is primarily 'identified' in the realm of the unconscious, as the above dream sequence verifies.

By witnessing Jewel's killing of her brother and thereafter 'dreaming' Jewel's killing of Jewel, Marianne provides the figure of the young man with a central, overruling place in the articulation of her desire and, with this, of her

identity: “this recurring dream disturbed her and she awoke sweating, *though not precisely with fear*” (HV 10, my italics). Enter Jewel in the pantomime of Marianne’s pre-pubescent wet dreams.

4.3 Strange Desire and the Desire for Strangers

“Jewel’s brown throat rippled and, watching him, Marianne wondered if the urge she felt to touch him was a need or a desire or if, contrary to what Donally said, both were functionally the same” —Angela Carter, *Heroes and Villains*, 95

As Carter herself told Elaine Jordan, “Marianne *is* very much a stranger to her own desire, which is why her desire finds its embodiment as a stranger” (Sage 1994b: 198). Julia Kristeva also speaks of “strangers” and “foreigners” who, far from being safely commodified as Others, inhabit the core of the subject and are a primordial part of its ‘being’, so that it becomes fruitless and ludicrous to fight against them.⁵

Strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity [...] The foreigner is within us. And when we flee from our struggle against the foreigner, we are fighting our unconscious [...] Delicately, analytically, Freud does not speak of foreigners: he teaches us how to detect foreignness in ourselves. (Kristeva 1991: 1, 191)

The articulation of the young girl’s strange, foreign desire is central to the narrative, and every single episode that occurs in Marianne’s fictional life revolves around it. To start with, Marianne’s escapade into the forest with the beautiful Barbarian is the necessary and utopian *locus amoenus* for her desire to be explored to its ultimate consequences. Catherine Belsey argues that “[desire] has no settled place to be” for “what if sexuality precisely calls into question that

opposition between nature and culture? What if there is no human sexual relation outside culture, outside the regime of the signifier?" (1994: 5). That is to say, how would it be possible for Jewel —the personification of desire itself— to exist within the regulatory regime in which Marianne is born, the society of the Professors, with its strict rules and altogether unseductive administration? Belsey continues, "desire is ... the location of resistances to the norms, proprieties and taxonomies of the cultural order" (1994: 6). Desire belongs in the utopian world, precisely because it is not repressed, but scrutinised "behind the back of the Enlightenment, so to speak, not in secret, but in a region which can remain unacknowledged in the hard, rational, analytical world whose hero is 'man'" (Belsey 1994: 11). This region Belsey alludes to is, in her own words, "private, marginal and in a sense feminine" (1994: 11). This region is the sensual, stimulating forest that the Barbarians inhabit, not the Enlightened concrete villages of the Professors, furnished with phallic spires and surrounded by barb wire, i. e. Belsey's "hard, rational, analytical world whose hero is 'man'" (1994: 11). Desire needs, therefore, a region between fantasy and reality, "private, marginal" (Belsey 1994: 11), a place where Marianne finds a voice to describe Jewel thus:

she could not deny that he looked marvellously exotic, with grains of black paint in the corners of his eyes, eyes with extraordinarily heavy lids. As she continued with her task [she is combing his long mane], tension diminished; it was an action altogether out of time, something she would never have believed possible for herself and, as she felt the dry, gleaming weight of his endless black hair slide through her

fingers, the repetition and intimacy of her movements and the strangeness of the events of the day combined almost to subdue her.

(HV 78)

In her dissertation on desire, Belsey poses an interesting question: “can we ... talk seriously about desire without taking into account psychoanalysis?” (1994: 14). The answer would be ‘no’, primarily because psychoanalysis still stands as the only theory that takes desire seriously by which any attempts to delve into this enigmatic terrain will be distorted, out of focus, if unaided by it.

Within Freudian philosophy, identity is understood as split into two different yet complementary confines: consciousness and the unconscious. The unconscious, one of the central tenets of psychoanalysis, is formed, according to Freud, after a primordial loss. Within Freudian ideology, then, identity thus becomes inseparably interwoven with sexuality. It is at the dramatic moment of the Oedipal crisis that the gender identity of the child is formed and, with it, the unconscious also appears:

At a very early age the little boy develops an object-cathexis [i.e. the transfer of erotic energy to an object] for his mother, which originally related to the mother’s breast ...; the boy deals with his father by identifying himself with him. For a time these two relationships proceed side by side, until the boy’s sexual wishes in regard to his mother become more intense and his father is perceived as an obstacle to them; from this the Oedipus complex originates. (Freud 1961: XIX, 32)

The phantasy of a 'love affair' of sorts with the mother which Freud describes as "sexual wishes" (Freud 1961: XIX, 32) with regard to her, and which positions the child within the 'phallic phase', whereby he actively desires her as an object, needs to be stopped by the entry of a powerful third party in the shape of the father figure, who is "perceived as an obstacle to [the child's sexual wishes]", in Freud's words (Freud 1961: XIX, 32). At one and the same time, the little boy needs to be separated, 'castrated', from the maternal body and its promise of nurture in order to become an autonomous human being within what is known as 'culture'. Any anxieties that this potent principle —'culture'— inscribe in the individual will be reflected in the primordial anxiety that is achieved through the castration complex:

It is self-evident to a male child that a genital like his own is to be attributed to everyone he knows, and he cannot make its absence tally with his picture of these other people. This conviction is energetically maintained by boys, is obstinately defended against the contradictions which soon result from observation, and is only abandoned after severe internal struggles (the castration complex). The substitutes for the penis which they feel missing in women play a great part in determining the form taken by many perversions. (Freud 1953: VII, 195)

Through the "internal struggle" (Freud 1953: VII, 195) of the anxiety over castration, the boy represses his desire for his mother, and 'repression' is a key word here, for it is the means by which the little boy's unconscious will be effectively shaped. It is highly probable that Freud was aware of the fact that, in

his theoretical presentation, ‘masculinity’ is paradoxically achieved through the castration complex which promotes separation from the mother and identification with the father through fear of losing the penis, which represents —within the Freudian scenario— maleness. In other words, within the Freudian economy, the construction of a masculine identity is based on fear: the fear of losing the main symbol of virility within the said economy.

Freud’s tale about the achievement of masculinity remains, therefore, unclear, but where does Freudian theory leave the little girl and the construction of her desire? Surely the same loving and nurturing administrations that inaugurated the boy’s desire for the maternal body are at work in the relationship between mother and daughter, by which the little girl also goes through the ‘phallic phase’ of desire for the maternal body. Indeed, Freud tells his readers that the little girl’s phallic phase, by which she is positioned as an ‘active’ subject that longs for the object of psychical pleasure, coincides with her discovery of the clitoris as a source of physical pleasure (Freud 1925: V, 188).

The active phase, however, does not last long. When the little girl realises that a male counterpart has a larger pleasure organ —by which pleasure must surely come in more satisfactory ways for him— she becomes angry with her mother, who is seen by the girl as the agent responsible for her lack of a penis:

They [girls] notice the penis of a brother or playmate, strikingly visible and of large proportions, at once recognize it as the superior counterpart of their own small and inconspicuous organ, and from that time forward fall victim to envy for the penis. (Freud 1925: V, 190)

At the same time that rejection of the mother occurs, the girl gives up her clitoral—and thus active—performance and turns to the father for consolation. It is obvious that the castration complex does not operate on girls with the effectiveness it operates on boys for, according to Freud, girls see themselves as castrated once they have compared their source of pleasure with that of a boy:

She has seen it and knows that she is without it and wants to have it. Here what has been named the masculinity complex branches off. It may put great difficulties in the way of the regular development towards femininity, if it cannot be got over soon enough. The hope of some day obtaining a penis in spite of everything and so of becoming a man may persist to an incredibly late stage and may become a motive for strange and otherwise unaccountable actions [...] After a woman has become aware of the wound to her narcissism she develops, like a scar, a sense of inferiority. When she has passed beyond her first attempt at explaining her lack of a penis as being a punishment personal to herself and has realized that that sexual character is a universal one, she begins to share the contempt felt by men for a sex which is the lesser in so important a respect, and, at least in holding that opinion, insists on being like a man. (Freud 1961: XIX, 253)

Thus, the castration anxiety functioning for boys is transformed into penis envy where girls are concerned. When the girl turns to her father for consolation, she is also undergoing a psychological process which will transform her sexuality into passive and receptive. Her meanders through her genital area will now take her to

discover her vagina as an organ of pleasure, thereby leaving aside her premature, clitoral findings.

Freudian theory on psychosexual development, which was observed and expanded years later by Jacques Lacan, positions girls, and therefore the women they will become, as passive objects of desire who “[develop], like a scar, a sense of inferiority” (Freud 1961: XIX, 253). The shift from the mother to the father as an object of desire, mirrored in that other biological shift—from clitoris to vagina as a source of pleasure—clearly situates women on the receiving end where sexual intercourse is concerned. Freud’s theorisation on psychosexual development, his choice of words to describe the processes which girls go through, of which the above quote would be a fine example, and his final conclusions on the passive position women occupy within the sexual scenario have had an impact not only on the way men think of women, but also on the way women think of themselves.⁶ In his poststructuralist translations of Freud, Jacques Lacan takes the theory of his predecessor and locates it within the realm of language, thereby arguing that once the little girl perceives that she lacks what grants value and power within society—the much-desired phallus—she enters language in a negative way (Minsky 1996: 159). The obvious consequence of this negative entry into language is that she becomes unable to actively ‘represent’, by which she can only be represented.

In the novel under consideration, however, the reader finds himself/herself confronting a young woman, Marianne, who, far from being a passive, receptive figure, commodified as an object of desire, allows her unconscious to flow in wild ways, to the point that it becomes personified in the figure of a beautiful young

man. In turn, she 'represents' Jewel through such perspicacious descriptions as "a curiously shaped, attractive stone [...] *an object which drew her*" (HV 82, my italics). What went wrong, Dr Freud?

Elaine Jordan has claimed that "the fascination with Jewel as beautiful Barbarian is a revenge for the erotic objectification of women" (Jordan 1994: 203). It is my belief, however, that what Carter offers here is much more complex than a mere, simplistic inversion of roles. An interesting point about Freudian theory is its problematic relation with women as objects of study. Women seem to pose an intricate mystery and a certain fascination for the (male) psychoanalyst for, as he admits, the young girl never completely gives up her desire for the maternal body. After all, how can the castration complex operate on a subject that—within the Freudian scenario—has 'nothing' to castrate? If the castration complex does not perform its function as a coercion for the satisfaction of the child's desire, it must surely follow that the girl never completely gives up her desire for the maternal body nor her clitoral activity, by which she never ceases to be an active agent—more active, it could be argued, than the boy himself, who is policed by the paternal law. Hence the paradox inherent to Freudian theory—its acknowledged inability to read female sexuality— which has made feminist academia wonder whether all his theoretical corpus was not devised in order to provide a satisfactory, psychological explanation for the cultural subjection of women to phallic power in the shape of patriarchy.⁷

It is in the 'phallic', clitoral, or active phase that we need to locate Marianne and her seductive discoveries, which lead her to personify her unconscious desire, her Other, in Jewel. Throughout *Heroes*, Carter lays bare

Marianne’s autonomy to imagine, to actively desire her partner through her flight from an initially repressive scenario —Professorland— where the law of the Father was felt mainly through a severe and acrimonious social administration. Once she liberates herself, so to speak, from the “mind forg’d manacles” that the society she was born into and shaped her consciousness embodies, she is propelled into her own unconscious where she is able to write her own version of the story, to actively represent the Other, as she moves on.

4.4 Desire Articulated

“I’ve often thought of grooming Jewel for some kind of mythopoetic role. If he never made the final rung of full-scale divinity, I’m sure he could easily acquire the kind of semi-legendary status that King Arthur had ... He could be the Messiah of the Yahoos” —Donally in Angela Carter’s *Heroes and Villains*, 93

In her dive into the psychoanalytic pool, Marianne constructs Jewel as her Other, her *alter ego*, almost an imagined version of herself whose dark flesh constitutes a “magic source of attraction” (HV 83). Chris Weedon tells us that “in reality no one can control desire since no one can occupy the position of the Other, the structuring principle of human culture, and become the source of language rather than an effect of it” (1987: 53). These words apparently contradict my statement that Jewel is desire itself, but Weedon is making a very valid point; certainly, “*no one* can occupy the position of the Other” (Weedon 1987: 53, my italics) . In one of the most cathartic passages of the novel, Marianne is finally able to understand the (lack of) position she has provided Jewel with, and so she tries to make him understand it thus:

You are the most remarkable thing I ever saw in all my life. Not even in pictures had I seen anything like you, nor read your description in books, you with your jewels, paints, furs, knives and guns, like a phallic and diabolic version of female beauties of former periods. What I'd like best would be to keep you in preserving fluid in a huge jar on the mantelpiece of my peaceful room, *where I could look at you and imagine you*. And that's the best place for you, you walking masterpiece of art, since the good Doctor educated you so far above your station you might as well be an exhibit for intellectuals to marvel at as anything else. *You, you're nothing but the furious invention of my virgin nights*. (HV 137, my italics)

At the beginning of this section, I discussed how to try and read Jewel, with his "jewels, paints, furs, knives and guns" (HV 137), in the light of social discourses such as that of the 'natural man' in Rousseau, proves totally inadequate. Jewel inevitably cannot hold a social identity, as he is merely a figment of the *id* and, as such, outside the realms of discourse. Gerardine Meaney argues that "to talk of the Barbarians in terms of [Rousseau's] *Discourse* is to talk of them as already poised on the threshold of civilisation" (1993: 110). Their 'presence', just like Jewel's, is 'real' exclusively in the imaginary of the girl's unconscious, where she can "look" at him and "imagine" him, where he is, precisely, "nothing but the furious invention of [her] virgin nights" (HV 137). If *Heroes* is a rewriting of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1816-1818), as Elaine Jordan has suggested (in Anderson 1990: 19), it is not because Jewel self-destructs, as Jordan goes on to argue, but because, like Frankenstein's creature, he is someone else's invention.

The deconstruction —“decentering” in Linda Hutcheon’s words (1995 [1989]: 13)— to which the ‘subject’ Jewel is susceptible does not end in Marianne’s above eroticised declaration of rights. In an account of one of his fits of anger, Marianne mysteriously describes how:

One evening, Jewel broke every pot on the old dresser in an outburst of rage. He hurled the antique crockery around the room; his brothers fled, helter-skelter, giggling with fear, but Marianne did not bother to move from her seat. He threw a soup tureen at her; it missed, of course, *since neither it nor he were real*. It crashed into the fire. He also began to attack the slaughtered carcasses with remarkable ferocity and, another evening, silently approached her during the butchery hour and daubed her face with his bloody hands, an action she construed immediately and immediately despised, as if he were helplessly trying to prove his autonomy to her *when she knew all the time he vanished like a phantom at daybreak, or earlier, at the moment when her body ceased to define his outlines*. (HV 89, my italics)

Jewel can try hard to impose his menacing presence on Marianne. All his attempts are, at the best of times, futile. The young woman who has constructed him knows that he is not flesh but, rather, that he will “[vanish] like a phantom at daybreak, or earlier, at the moment when her body cease[s] to define his outlines” (HV 89). The moment Jewel stops performing the role Marianne has given him on her psychic stage —the role of object of desire— he ceases to exist, and Marianne “defend[s] herself by denying him an existence outside the dual being they made

while owls pounced on velvet mice in the forest” (HV 88). In a final twist on this issue, the narrative makes Jewel himself aware of his status as a projection, as is verifiable by his words: “[s]ometimes I dream I am an invention of the Professors; they project their fears outside on us so they won’t stay in their villages, infecting them” (HV 82) and, “[e]verywhere I go,” he states, “I’m doomed to be nothing but an exhibit” (HV 124). This affirmation by Jewel is sad, but true. He is a beautiful and exotic exhibit for every person who meets him, including the mad ex-Professor, Donally, who claims that he is “trying to invent [Jewel] as I go along but I am experiencing certain difficulties ... He won’t keep still long enough” (HV 94). Not to keep still is futile resistance, Jewel does not exist as an autonomous being, and he is nothing but the projection of fear and desire.

Again, the terrifying mask that Barbarians exhibit in order to startle Professors during their raids loses its initial design once it falls off. The Barbarians, mainly epitomised through the figure of Jewel, are far from terrifying without their paraphernalia and social outfits and they become nothing without them.⁸ They are signs, which, ultimately, has the power of alienating them. Towards the end of the novel, Marianne has become an expert in seeing beyond the Barbarian external, fake glamour:

quite dissolved was the marvellous, defiant construction of textures and colours she first glimpsed marauding her tranquil village; it had vanished as an illusion which could not sustain itself in the white beams of the lighthouse. (HV 147)

For Catherine Belsey, the source of unconscious desire is unmistakable, and it should be found in prohibition which, “far from inhibiting libido ... promotes

unconscious desire for an object that can never be found” (1994: 52). The prohibition Marianne was subject to amongst the Professors acted as a catalyst for the search for an object which, according to Belsey’s readings of Freud and Lacan, can never be found or identified, for it is merely a re-presentation of an original object —the maternal body and its loving administrations— which is forever lost after the Oedipal crisis (1994: 52). Jewel represents this lost object for Marianne, his lack of identification/identity being repeatedly exposed in the text.

Jacques Lacan sheds further light on Jewel’s utter lack of an identity when he explains how the original loss returns and presents itself as desire: “the desire of (for) the Other, the origin of meaning, which entails *a lack of being*” (1966: 166, my italics). Thus the subject becomes merely a consequence of what he calls the *Nom/Non-du-Père* and his/her realm, the Symbolic, both produces and prohibits —or, rather, produces by prohibiting— unconscious desire, a desire “for nothing nameable” (Belsey 1994: 61) but which is articulated in the unconscious. The conclusion, therefore, would be that desire “radically heterogeneous, even to itself ... cannot be presented, made present” (Belsey 1994: 75), it is “not real” (HV 89), it “vanishes like a phantom” (HV 89), it “dissolve[s]” (HV 147), it is “nothing but [a] furious invention” (HV 137).

4.5 Desire Represented

“I am trying to invent [Jewel] as I go along but I am experiencing certain difficulties ... He won’t keep still long enough. Creation from the void is more difficult than it would seem” —Donally in Angela Carter’s *Heroes and Villains*, 94

The mechanisms that Marianne uses in order to imagine Jewel are worthy of attention. It is through the story that Marianne is telling that Jewel can ‘become’, that he can ‘be’ —in turn a savage, a demon lover, a hero, a villain, a furious fantasy. Chris Weedon states how language is “the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is *constructed*” (1994 [1987]: 21). Language, therefore, becomes the common factor in the analysis of social organisation, the operations of power and the individual consciousness within poststructuralist theory. The question, however, is how this subjectivity is understood within poststructuralist convictions. Weedon declares that:

for poststructuralism, subjectivity *is neither unified nor fixed*. Unlike humanism, which implies a conscious, knowing, unified, rational subject, poststructuralism theorizes subjectivity as *a site of disunity and conflict*, central to the process of political change and to preserving the status quo. (1994 [1987]: 21, my italics)

This product of the *id* that Jewel becomes within Marianne’s narrative of desire, therefore, is a subject, albeit in poststructuralist terms. Since “poststructuralism proposes a subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse everytime we speak or think” (Weedon 1994 [1987]: 33), Jewel becomes a poststructuralist subject in so far as he is “neither unified nor fixed”, a “site of disunity and conflict” (Weedon 1994 [1987]: 21), and he is constantly being reshaped in Marianne’s articulation of her desire.

Unlike Humanism, which proclaimed the Cartesian subject as unique, autonomous, in possession of an internal core or essence, poststructuralism not only explores, but it promotes the notion of a ‘decentred’ subject called into

question as every word is uttered and every sentence is constructed. “To represent the self is to ‘constitute’ the self,” Linda Hutcheon asserts in *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1995 [1989]: 41). In so far as Marianne ‘represents’ Jewel by inscribing her desire on a textual body, she gives him an existence, although it is *discoherent* and in-process, constructed behind masks that promptly fall. In the young girl’s unconscious, “there is ... a story of a self, a construction of a subject, however ‘deconstructed’” (Hutcheon 1995 [1989]: 41). This deconstruction has an interesting result in that Jewel is thoroughly undermined as a “self-sufficient subject” and therefore “as the source of meaning or action” (Hutcheon 1995 [1989]: 108-109). His attempted suicide on the beach—which obviously fails—and his final death—rather a disappearing act from the narrative, as if he effectively dissolved—prove that he cannot possibly be the source of meaning within the context of the story. Jewel is a dead-end, a closed circuit in himself, and he disappears in the quiet, yet another of Carter’s subversions that her hero’s death may be so restrained, considering the atmosphere of romance and expectation which his appearance in the text had initially created. Meaning and action, however, are present, and they come from the capable imagination of the subject who constructs the story in every sense of the word and who, therefore, positions herself at the centre of it. The next section of this study will explore desire from the subject’s perspective.

Notes

¹ I use inverted commas around ‘moral attitudes’ and ‘civilised’ because these are jeopardised by Antonio and Sebastian who, although they are quintessentially European, they plot murder for personal gain. In relation to this idea, even Prospero’s morality is problematised in convincing ways by recent post-structuralist readings of *The Tempest*. See, for instance, *Alternative Shakespeares*, John Drakakis, ed. 1985, especially chapter 9 “Nymphs and reapers heavenly vanish: the discursive con-texts of *The Tempest*,” by Francis Barker and Peter Hulme, pp. 191-205. For full publication details of this text, see the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

² It is my belief that the main story line behind *Heroes* plays upon a somewhat common female fantasy, which is the escape from quotidian reality to an exotic and erotic world, where social rules do not apply. Carter manipulates this fantasy so that it effectively provides her with a setting where her issues of interest might be articulated. On the other hand, however, she also explores what would happen if such a fantasy of erotic domination actually took place and was exercised to its ultimate consequences. For an interesting debate on this issue, see Jessica Benjamin’s “Master and Slave: The Fantasy of Erotic Domination,” included in the volume *Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (1983, pp. 292-311). Benjamin’s essay is about “the strange union of rationality and violence” (1983: 292) present in the fantasy of erotic domination, and she sets out to demonstrate how such a fantasy “embodies the desire for both independence and recognition. Deep yearnings of *selfhood* and *transcendence*” (1983: 292, my italics). Full publication details of Benjamin’s text under the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

³ For an interesting and thorough study of the figure of the Demon Lover, see Catherine Belsey’s *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture* (1994). Throughout chapter 7, “Demon Lovers” (pp. 164-184) Belsey refers to the work of Mario Praz, entitled *The Romantic Agony* and published in 1931, where he traces the nineteenth century’s erotic fascination with beauty in combination with horror. My reading of the figure of Jewel is in line with Belsey’s argument on Demon Lovers. As the cause of desire, Belsey argues that Demon Lovers exceed rational explanation and evoke a realm beyond the alternatives of good and evil, life and death and truth and fiction (1994: 173).

⁴ For an insightful study of the figure of Heathcliff as the ‘dispossessed’, see Terry Eagleton’s essay “Myths of Power in *Wuthering Heights*,” included in his *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*. For full publication details, see the **Works Cited** section in the present study.

⁵ For a study of the foreigner within the subject see Gemma López & Enric Monforte’s “‘You Make Me Feel Like A Natural Woman’: Killing Deviance in Jonathan Demme’s *The Silence of the Lambs*”. Full publication details of this text can be found in the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

⁶ Kate Millett’s extensive critique of Freud is still interesting to refer to in this context. See her *Sexual Politics* (1969), pp. 176-220. Full publication details of Millett’s text in the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

⁷ For interesting re-deployments of Freudian theory, see Karen Horney’s “The Flight from Womanhood: The Masculinity-Complex in Women, Viewed by Men and Women”, Helene Deutsch’s “The Significance of Masochism in the Mental Life of Women”, Jeanne Lampl de Groot’s “The Evolution of the Oedipus Complex in Women”, Joan Riviere’s “Womanliness as a Masquerade”, and Maria Torok’s “The Meaning of ‘Penis Envy’ in Women”. All these essays are collected under Part I of *Psychoanalysis and Woman: A Reader*, edited in 2000 by S. Saguro. For full publication details, see the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

⁸ In Carter’s novel, *Nights at the Circus*, we can find a redeployment of this idea within the context of the clowns at the circus, especially through the figure of Buffo, the main clown, who states: “am I this Buffo whom I have created? Or did I, when I made up my face to look like Buffo’s, create, *ex nihilo*, another self who is not me? And what am I without my Buffo’s face? Why, nobody at all. Take away my make-up and underneath is merely not-Buffo. An absence. A vacancy.” (1984: 122)

5. “You Are Year One”: Marianne in Con-Text

“I’m just a girl/Guess I’m some kind of freak/
'Cause they all sit and stare with their eyes” —No Doubt, *Just A Girl*

“[W]e must not blame our poor symbols if they take forms that seem trivial to us, or absurd, for the symbols themselves have no control over their own fleshly manifestations, however paltry they may be; the nature of our life alone has determined their forms” —Angela Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 6

“Sexuality and eroticism are the intricate intersection of nature and culture” —Camille Paglia, “Sex and Violence, or Nature and Art,” in *Sex, Art and American Culture*, 13

“You’re born naked, and the rest is drag” —RuPaul, Brazilian drag artist

From the very first time that she is introduced in the narrative, Marianne, the female protagonist of Carter’s tale, is identified with the gaze, with eyes that look upon things which await discovery and scrutiny. The narrative voice, thoroughly permeated by the young woman’s focalisation, begins the tale by telling the reader that Marianne “had sharp, cold eyes and she was spiteful but her father loved her” (HV 1). Were *Heroes* a traditional *Bildungsroman*, this character introduction would stand as a clear indication that Marianne holds the ultimate position of supreme ‘subject’ within the tale, by which her counterpart within

narrative logic, Jewel, would play a more passive, and hence objectified role. *Heroes*, however, departs from the traditional tenets of a novel of personal development already in its refusal to present a 'realistic' narrative sequence, and so any conjecture whereby Marianne might occupy a stable, essential subject position soon begins to crumble.

It will be the aim of this section to assess how Carter readily escapes a conventionalised construction of literary subjectivity and the common practice of the *Bildungsroman* by basing her tale on a character who, far from acquiring a Cartesian subjectivity through experience and learning, is subjected to a number of traditionally female roles to finally release herself from them and claim a fluid, more liberating, sense of subjectivity. *Heroes*, therefore, advocates for a (female) subjectivity in poststructuralist terms, for the 'subject' that Marianne becomes remains at risk, and as open to (re)construction as the ending of the tale itself. Marianne is "Year One" (Carter 1984: 257) in so far as by the end of the story a new life may begin for her, as she is allowed by the narrative to choose to occupy any subject position she may decide.

For a significant part of the story, Marianne finds it difficult —although by no means impossible— to escape her 'feminine' fate through an almost compulsive identification with the myth of 'Woman' that the two societies between which she lives have constructed. As such, the process that she undergoes throughout the novel would be similar to the one described by Germaine Greer in *The Female Eunuch* (1970), where the author argues that every girl child is conceived initially as a whole woman, but from the time of her birth to her death she is progressively 'disabled' by the dissatisfactions of (patriarchal)

‘culture’. Marianne, contrary to the grim perspective which Greer envisages for all women, cunningly gathers the remaining pieces of her self together to construct *her* —not everybody else’s— fantasy of her self, and to become the ruler of the roost, if need be.

5.1 Strangers Within Ourselves

“It’s all wrong for a girl to have hair as short as you’ [Mrs Green] said. ‘Why ever did they do it to you?’ ‘I did it to myself’. Mrs Green stared. ‘You’re an odd one, aren’t you. You can’t have fitted in’” —Angela Carter, *Heroes and Villains*, 67

In her passage through different subject positions, Marianne begins, very pertinently, impersonating the central figure of a fairy tale. She becomes a daring Little Red Riding Hood who, oblivious to potential danger and the warning tales of her nurse, strays off the path to discover not only that she does not get lost, but that the forest encapsulates no dangers such as those she has heard of back in the Professor village:

She would go off by herself into the swamp, although her nurse forbade her. Marianne was very wiry and agile. She picked her way where the sheep went, trying to imagine numbers of men, women and children, but she never fell over or hurt herself. She learned to beware of the ugly plants covered with razor-sharp thorns that grew everywhere and never even to touch the sticky, green and purple berries swarming with iridescent flies which these plants produced in autumn, for the noxious sap burned the fingers [...] she would find the picked remains of bones of animals and human excrement, indicating

that the ghosts in the ruins ate and defecated and therefore were unlikely to be ghosts at all, or ghosts only in the sense that they had forfeited their social personalities. (HV 7-8)

Marianne's wit and cunning in identifying the possible hazards that the swamp comprises —the “ugly plants covered with razor-sharp thorns” and the “noxious sap” (HV 7-8)— and making a detour in order not to confront them undermines the conventional representation of feminine behaviour as passive, inane, and dependent, found in more traditional narratives, such as the fairy tale, to which this particular extract is making obvious references. After all, for a girl child who has been brutally propelled into the violent symbolic through witnessing the murder of her brother at the hands of a Barbarian boy, a stroll in the forest is far from terrifying. Fear is soon conquered and, with it, mobility is achieved. It is only ‘wicked’ girls that go anywhere they fancy.

These little escapades into the forest are, if anything, metaphorical. To begin with, the lavishly gothic descriptions of wild vegetation stand as a symbol of Marianne's own wild ‘becoming’: “blossom covered the hawthorn bushes, the wilderness bloomed. Moon-daisies, buttercups in all manner of wild flowers hid in the foaming grass [...] she could hear her own blood moving through her body” (HV 12). Secondly, they also allow the reader to understand how and why Marianne is an odd one out within her community, as Mrs Green will later confirm. Not only is she defying the strict rules of curfew established by the Soldiers, she is also invalidating the acculturation passed on by her nurse and which is based on fear, the actual bedrock on which her education as a woman should be founded.

Marianne is indeed an odd one out, but she does not fully realise this until she comes back home from the forest one day to find that the gate to the community is locked. Just like Connie Chatterley’s relation with Wragby is dramatically altered after her first sexual encounter with Oliver Mellors to the point that the gate is locked on her when she goes back to the estate from the woods, Marianne’s relation to her own community will also change after her little detours, her expeditions through the forest. Marianne, like Connie, becomes ‘infected’ by her tendency to explore the world beyond the place to which she belongs.

Thus, the gates of ‘home’ are closed on her, in the same way they are closed on the adulteress Connie. This metaphor points to the fact that both women were strangers in their own home before, a notion which is now openly bespoken through barred doors. It will be this realisation, together with her learning terrible news about the nurse going mad and brutally killing her father Lizzie-Borden style, that will take Marianne to start a fresh page in her life. Shedding her past, Marianne burns her father’s books for, after all, it is not really the books she needs, but the little information she could extract from their reading, she drowns her father’s clock in the swamp, and chops off her “long, fair hair so she looked like a demented boy” (HV 15), the first of a chain of ‘abuses’ that she performs upon her body as a radical means of establishing her difference.

A new life and a whole set of subject positions are open for Marianne once she decides to escape with Jewel, the Barbarian boy. It is a new life in its own right, for Marianne decides to leave behind all those possessions she has been carefully marking with her name through years of Professorial indoctrination on

the convenience of private property. Once outside the gates of the rational community and in the company of Jewel, even vegetation begins to change, to become more strangely seductive:

Plants she could not name *thrust luscious spires towards her hands*; great chestnuts fantastically turreted with greenish bloom *arched above her head*; the curded white blossom of the hawthorn *closed every surrounding perspective* and a *running tangle* of little roses went in and out, this way and that way, through the leafy undergrowth. *These roses opened flat as plates* and from them drifted the faintest and most tremulous of scents, *like that of apples*. Though this scent was so fragile, still it seemed the real breath of a *wholly new* and vegetable world, a world as *unknown and mysterious to Marianne as the depths of the sea; or the body of the young man who slept, it would seem, sweetly, in her lap*. (HV 22, my italics)

The subjectivity Marianne has been eagerly constructing up to this point —that of the deviant girl who does not adapt to the austere and demanding rules of her society, even that of the Romantic heroine who is unable to fit in a system that she finds unfair— will begin to deconstruct as soon as she takes the decision of fleeing her village with a declared enemy of her own people. Marianne's journey into her own unconscious, into the gap, begins, and the discovery and exploration of the dark side of the moon in the shape of unrepressed desire for a young man starts. As Day argues:

In Marianne's case, the professional rationalism that seeks to deny the power of the id sets up in her a longing —which she does not initially

comprehend— to get in touch with the id. It sets up in her a longing to engage with the Barbarian strangeness that is physically outside her community but which resides in her own being [...] It is her own desire she finds, and which is, fundamentally, much more important than Jewel himself. (1998: 46-47)

The journey which Marianne begins has parallels with that other ‘journey’ described by Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*, as Fernando Galván has argued (1994). According to Galván, in *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad “explora el viejo tema del viaje como fuente de conocimiento y de descubrimiento del propio ser” (in Galván et. al. 1994: 79), in a journey which is described as “interior”, for it offers “menos énfasis en lo externo y en el espacio físico, para concentrarse en el aspecto del aprendizaje y del acceso al auto-conocimiento del héroe” (in Galván et. al. 1994: 80).¹ This journey, described as “interior” by Galván, has coincidences with the movement that takes Marianne from Professorland to the Barbarian settlement, where a new kind of ‘reality’ develops. Following this argument, Pilar Hidalgo reminds us that:

la narrativa de Carter [...] no intenta reflejar la realidad, tal como este escurridizo concepto es aceptado mayoritariamente en la civilización occidental, sino que se propone crear *una realidad nueva, o traer a la superficie una realidad reprimida por las presiones de la existencia civilizada*. (Hidalgo 1987: 177, my italics)

More wildly, Julia Kristeva makes the point that “woman is a specialist in the unconscious, a witch, a bacchanalian, taking her *jouissance* in an anti-Apollonian, Dionysian orgy” (Kristeva in Saguaro 2000: 256). Hence Marianne, a specialist in

the unconscious, begins a pilgrimage which will create a new reality, or bring to the surface one which has been repressed by civilization, and for which her pre-pubescent expeditions through the forest will be good practice indeed. Fortunately, she does not get easily scared, not even when the first experience on her way to the Barbarian settlement in the deep forest comes in the shape of an adder bite.

5.2 Marianne Lamed For Life

That an adder bites Marianne deserves some attention. To begin with, the incident provides a cue for the girl and Jewel to have their first intimate moment. Once Marianne is bitten:

[Jewel] made her lie down on the grass, took his sharp knife and cut the wound then put his mouth against it, sucked out the poison, spat and continued to suck. She clenched and unclenched her fists to feel the extraordinary sensation of his wet mouth against her skin and the pain was terrible. (HV 29)

The pleasure derived from Jewel's sucking on Marianne's leg is tinted with overt sexual overtones which do not escape Marianne herself: "the extraordinary sensation of his wet mouth against her skin" (HV 29). The biting of the adder is also the reason why, according to the narrative voice, "[t]he rest of the journey to the encampment had the quality of a hallucination" (HV 29). Eyes and balance deceive her for the first time in her short life, by which the idea that Marianne is entering her own hallucinating unconscious, her "erotic imagination" (Gamble 1997: 77) is further reinforced.

Finally, the incident also helps draw a parallelism between Marianne's and Catherine Earnshaw's 'coming of age', with yet another reference that Carter makes to Emily Brontë's novel.² The reader of *Wuthering Heights* will remember how, in one of Cathy and Heathcliff's scampers on the moors, they reach the Linton estate and, moved by childhood curiosity, they peep through the window to discover a world completely removed from the one they inhabit. The two children witness a world of physical comfort in which they contemplate the Linton children's fight over a puppy. The intruders, however, are discovered, and the Lintons let their dogs out to protect, by means of brutality and violence, their precious private property. Even though he has a chance to escape the attack, Heathcliff stays once he realises that Cathy has been violently bitten by the dog Skulker and her leg is damaged and bleeding profusely.

The Lintons cannot believe their own eyes once they discover the scene. Miss Earnshaw scampering over the moors with a servant is inconceivable, but the drama of the actual bleeding is even worse, to the point that Mrs Linton envisages that Cathy might be "lamed for life" (Brontë 1965 [1845]: 43). Little does Mrs Linton know that her words are premonitory. Cathy is indeed 'lamed for life', yet not physically. Her inability to walk for some weeks forces her to stay at the Linton estate, after which her relationship with Heathcliff will be forever transformed. And, furthermore, she will be 'lamed for life', in the sense that her childhood roamings will be abandoned, her savage ways will be forfeited, and she will be incorporated into the symbolic that the Lintons represent, 'civilised' as it were, metamorphosed into a little dame through the operations of 'culture' and a

little pampering from the rich. Cathy becomes a 'woman' with Skulker's help, a feminine coming of age which, like any other, involves a great deal of blood.

The adder incident in *Heroes*, which mirrors Cathy's violent encounter with Skulker, features blood, pain, and the sensuality of Jewel's operation on Marianne's wounded leg, the three elements, according to Carter, which involve 'becoming' in the brutal scenario of the young girl's teenage fantasy. Once she becomes a 'woman', even if it is through a metaphorical twist of the tale, Marianne begins a process by which all the subject positions offered to her are created by external (patriarchal) agents. Carter is probably making a point about the mythification that the 'subject' 'Woman' undergoes in the symbolic of patriarchal culture for, against her own will, Marianne helplessly becomes a witch, Medusa, the hopeless 'victim' of rape, a bride, a wife, and a mother. It is only when she cleanses herself of these super-imposed positions that she can attain the last one in the tale —although by no means the conclusive one, for the novel is significantly open-ended: that of the Tiger Lady, namely, the ruler of the horde.

5.3 Marianne Mythified

"It's a well-known fact that Professor women sprout sharp teeth in their private parts, to bite off the genitalia of young men" —Donally in Angela Carter's *Heroes and Villains*, 49

Although not necessarily Christian in nature, the Barbarians are very much governed by any cult which awakens their curiosity, such as the worship of *Viperus Berus*, the snake Donally keeps in a cage and which only comes out on special occasions. Marianne's mythification within the tribe comes from the very

obvious fact that she is a foreigner and, as such, a source of mysterious attraction though also of rejection in equal ways. It is highly probable that had Marianne seen the motif tattooed on Jewel’s back from their first meeting, she would have understood much better the sort of mythological disguises which the Barbarians had in store for her:

He wore the figure of a man on the right side, a woman on the left and, tattooed the length of his spine, a tree with a snake curled round and round the trunk. This elaborate design was executed in blue, red, black and green. The woman offered the man a red apple and more red apples grew among green leaves at the top of the tree, spreading across his shoulders, and the black roots of the tree twisted and ended at the top of his buttocks. The figures were both stiff and lifelike: *Eve wore a perfidious smile*. The lines of colour were etched with obsessive precision on the shining, close-pored skin which rose and fell with Jewel’s breathing, so it seemed the snake’s forked tongue darted in and out and the leaves on the tree moved in a small wind, an effect the designer must have foreseen and allowed for. (HV 85, my italics)

The Myth of the Fall, with a perfidious Eve and helpless Adam is reenacted on Jewel’s back every time he breathes, in a timeless, unavoidable recollection of the primordial sin. “Eve wore a perfidious smile” (HV 85) in the motif because the designer —Donally— would like to believe that she was a deceitful woman who should be blamed for all the calamities of the human race. Actually, not unlike Marianne, who will be forced to play the part of Eve in the psychodrama Donally

wants to turn her visit into —“pretend you’re Eve at the end of the world,” she is told (HV 124)—, with Jewel as a beautiful Adam and Donally himself as the Supreme Creator, of course. In her assessment of the Myth of the Fall, Julia Kristeva argues that:

The myth of the relationship between Eve and the serpent is the best summary of [the exclusion of women from knowledge and power]. The serpent stands for the opposite of God, since he tempts Eve to transgress His prohibition. But he is also Adam’s repressed desire to transgress, that which he dares not carry out, and which is his shame. The sexual symbolism helps us understand that the serpent is that in which, in God or Adam, remains beyond or outside the sublimation of the Word. Eve has no relationship other than with that, and even then because she is its very opposite, the ‘other race’. (Saguaro 2000: 247-248)

Although Donally tries hard to exclude Marianne —the “other race”, in Kristeva’s words (2000: 248)— from knowledge and power within the community he rules over, he is unable to take into account that she is, after all, a well-read Professor girl who will refuse to be sublimated through the acceptance of his administrations as post-nuclear guru. As such, even when he tells her that she has to become their holy image, “the virgin of the swamp” (HV 50), she still rebuffs any mythifications which will potentially turn against herself and her cohabitation with the members of the tribe.

Donally’s discourse is furnished with Christian references. Obviously, his past as a Professor granted him access to and knowledge of the Bible; the rest of

the community, however, regard the stranger in a much more secular manner. For them, she is merely a witch. The first person to whom she is introduced, an old woman, promptly makes the sign of the Evil Eye, once she realises Marianne is a Professor girl (HV 31), and it is only when the rest of the community witness that Mrs Green does not turn to stone as a result of Marianne’s kiss that they gather around her (HV 34). Thus Marianne becomes the mythological Medusa, whose gaze transformed men and women alike into figures of stone, a similitude which is interesting and even ironically coherent in so far as, as has been argued above, Marianne is repeatedly associated with the power of her scrutinising gaze.

“What ice-water eyes you have,” Jewel tells Marianne *à la* Little Red Riding Hood (HV 79). The realisation that she witnessed his murder of her brother thoroughly changes Jewel’s relationship towards Marianne: “she converted me into something else by *seeing* me”, he says (HV 122, my italics), fully acknowledging both the symbolic meaning of that first encounter and Marianne’s authoring of him, focused on in the previous section of this study. Eyes, knife, and blood were the elements which governed over Jewel and Marianne’s first vision of each other. They will never disappear, not when Jewel rapes Marianne, not when she is forced to marry him, and not even when she bids him her last goodbye. Theirs is a life in common dominated by the symbolic motif of eyes, knife, and blood.

Interestingly enough, the only person Marianne cannot really ‘see’ is herself, as the community makes no use of mirrors, and the only substitute for these are the glasses Donally wears which, significantly, are cracked and so “revealed [...] modes of being to which she might aspire just as soon as she threw

away her reason as of no further use to her, since it scarcely helped her to construe the enigmas all about her” (HV 107). Identification in a Lacanian fashion, therefore, proves fruitless in Marianne’s predicament; in the microcosm created in the novel, a *stade du miroir* would prove completely futile.³

The mythic versions of the primordial female figure thrown upon Marianne, especially that of the spiritual, unattainable, motif of the virgin will vanish once she is made to come in violent contact with her corporeality through Jewel’s raping of her in the forest:

Feeling between her legs to ascertain the entrance, he thrust his fingers into the wet hole so roughly she knew what the pain would be like; it was scalding, she felt split to the core but *she did not make a single sound for her only strength was her impassivity and she never closed her cold eyes*, although the green sun made out the substance of his face to be polished metal and she recalled the murder she had witnessed, how the savage boy stuck his knife into her brother’s throat and the blood gushed out. Because she was difficult to penetrate, he spilled several hot mouthfuls of obscenities over her. Taken by force, the last shreds of interior flesh gave; he intended a violation and effected one; a tower collapsed upon her. Afterwards, there was a good deal of blood. (HV 55, my italics)

This scene, although “distinctly ideologically dodgy” in Carter’s own words (Jordan 1994: 197-198), is constructed around elements which deserve some attention. For a start, “pain” (HV 55) is present, by which the incident quite rightly awakens Marianne’s remembrance of the murder of her brother. Quite

rightly, because “the savage boy” (HV 55) who stuck the knife into the throat of her brother is the same who is now sticking his penis into her vagina, and possibly with the same incensed violence. Hence, the three elements which symbolically rule over Jewel and Marianne’s encounters appear again: the blood she sheds due to the loss of her virginity, the knife she remembers and which parallels the phallus with which Jewel now imposes himself on her, and the eyes Marianne refuses to close so as not to lose the little power she can still retain under the circumstances.

5.4 Corporeality and Erotic Possibilities

“Searching for her complementary zones, [Jewel] pushed the overwhelming folds of his foster-mother’s nightdress up around her waist. [Marianne] pulled the nightdress over her head and threw it away, so she could be still closer to him or, rather, to the magic source of attraction constituted by his brown flesh. And, if anything else but this existed, then she was sure it was not real” —Angela Carter, *Heroes and Villains*, 83

The rape scene, controversial as it is, performs a clear function within the narrative, for it brings Marianne’s body into narrative play. The girl’s previous, fleeting, connection with her body was supplied by the adder bite, to which reference is made after the rape, when Jewel uses a rag to stop the bleeding from Marianne’s body for the second time in a “repetition of action” which “would have been comic had she been in the mood to appreciate it” (HV 55). With the sudden intervention of her body in the drama of her tale of becoming, physicality is abruptly inaugurated, and Marianne begins the process by which she will be ‘secularised’ within the community, a process which reaches its climax once she is forced to marry Jewel in front of all the Barbarians.

If, as Michel Foucault argues, “[t]he body is ... directly involved in a political field” and “power relations ... invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (Foucault 1991 [1977]: 25), it does not really come as a surprise that Jewel decides to rape Marianne after she makes a futile attempt to escape the encampment, publicly putting his mastery over her in jeopardy. After all, there is nothing sexual in this rape or in any other rape for that matter. Rape is a rudimentary and brutal way of establishing power and announcing mastery, the most simplistic, probably, because domination is achieved through the (ab)use of the body, the “target of power” which is “manipulated, shaped, trained, ... obeys, responds, becomes skilful and increases its forces. [...] A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (Foucault 1991 [1977]: 136). Through the rape, Jewel endeavours to make Marianne docile, to tame the shrew, as it were, only to realise that, even if female “physicality is a medium for others to work on”, “[a] woman’s body is the battlefield where she fights for liberation” (Greer 1999: 106), and Marianne will fight not to be “manipulated”, “trained”, “transformed” (Foucault 1991 [1977]: 136) by any external agents, especially if they come in the shape of phallic mastery and Barbarian abuse.

Marianne refuses to accommodate to the role of stereotypical femininity in the very incident meant to “train” her. She refuses to feel afraid, the feeling upon which the rape fantasy and enactment would depend. She does not feel degraded, either, she is no victim, she is simply dominated by fury. This reaction is of particular importance to understand that the rape, as such, fails in its attempt to make the desired impact on her. Indeed, it is not really the actual abuse that makes

Marianne furious, but, rather, the fact that she has not been an active agent in the loss of her “white state of purity” (Jordan 1994: 197-198). In a letter to Elaine Jordan, Carter commented how it is noteworthy that “Marianne isn’t in the least interested in being pure, which is probably why she feels furious rather than soiled” by the abuse (Jordan 1994: 197-198). Agency, therefore, is of the utmost importance to Marianne, even within the psychic scenario of her fantasy.

Still, there is a further component to this particular incident which has not been taken into account as yet. If, as is being argued here, Marianne’s escape to the forest with Jewel is nothing but a diving into her unconscious, her *id*, then each and every single incident occurring during this lapse of time would be ‘constructed’ by her teenage imagination. In other words, if Jewel and his world are a figment of her teenage fantasies, the rape scene would constitute a desire on her part, rather than an ordeal she has to go through. This being the case, the fact that the incident makes Marianne furious becomes even more understandable and much less surprising. The power of the symbolic is not to be taken ludicrously, especially when it is able to colonise the psyche. This is the case here, with a young, virgin girl who wishes her virginity to be taken by force, so that she can pursue exploration of her erotic desire outside any responsibility, especially that which comes in the shape of romantic attachment.

That women have rape fantasies is nothing new. In her collection *My Secret Garden: Women’s Sexual Fantasies* (1975), Nancy Friday makes an extensive compilation of sexual fantasies as reported by women of diverse ages, ethnic groups, social classes, and sexual preferences. The book is interesting in so far as it is unmediated by any psychological, medical, or political discourse. What

readers find, instead, is the plain transcription of what women wrote or told the researcher. For Nancy Friday, the rape fantasy, which features as one of the commonest fantasies for women, relieves the person of any responsibility or even guilt with regard to her desire. The woman who is fantasising turns her erotic partner into an aggressor so that she seems to be forced to do what she really desires while remaining blameless all the while (Friday 1997 [1975]: 108-109). At the risk of stating the obvious, Friday stresses the accurate point that this fantasy has nothing to do with a wish-fulfilment; that is to say, the woman has no desire to be raped, and the message is not so much in the actual plot of the fantasy, but in the emotions that it releases (Friday 1997 [1975]: 109). The stress, therefore, is on the lack of responsibility on the part of the woman, which is what makes rape fantasies so striking.⁴

Hence Marianne gets her “necessary wound” which “will not last long”, as Jewel says (HV 55), and once it heals up, a myriad of erotic possibilities open for her. Paradoxically, after defloration has taken place by force, she is made free to explore her desire without the constraints of it being “a deep spiritual experience”, as her father had once described it for her (HV 57).

It is no surprise that it is precisely once she is made aware of her own physicality, her corporeality, that this new myriad of erotic possibilities begin for Marianne. After all, it is her body and its potentialities that she discovers and explores with the help of Jewel. However, with this awareness, a different process of mythification begins. The equation with the spotless and unattainable virgin seems to be a bit far-fetched at this stage, and so more ‘fleshy’ alternatives are sought and evidently found. When Jewel breaks the news that she is going to be

made to marry him the day after in order to “swallow [her] up and incorporate [her]” (HV 56), Marianne realises that she is on her way to occupying the traditionally feminine subject positions of wife and mother, and “an expression of horror ... crosse[s] her face” (HV 56). In the present state of affairs, it seems easier to reconcile herself to rape than it is to marriage.

Although the wedding ceremony that Donally has carefully devised for Jewel and Marianne is far from conventional, he must believe that a tinge of tradition always comes in handy, and so he produces a most extraordinary wedding dress for the bride.⁵ The dress, which has already been worn probably by another bride, is an exotic souvenir of the past which Marianne witnesses for the first time in a mixture of awe and repugnance:

As the room grew dark, the dress took on a moon-like glimmer and seemed to send out more and more filaments of tulle, like a growth of pale fungus shooting out air spores, a palpable white infection; viruses of plagues named after the labels of test-tubes in which they had been bred might survive for years under the briars of a dead city, nesting invisibly in the contents of just such a Pandora’s box as this metal chest, starred with singed stickers of foreign places dating from those times when foreign places had more than an imaginative existence, for where was Paris any more, where they had briefly worshipped the goddess Reason. (HV 68)

The description of the dress through the use of words related to diseases and plagues should not go unnoticed. To Marianne, it feels as if the dress had “pale fungus”, as if it was a “white infection” carrying “viruses of plagues”, an “image

of terror" (HV 68) from which she tries to recoil. It is helpless to address "the goddess Reason" (HV 68), she is not worshipped in the present Barbarian context, and so She will not come in aid of the young woman. The wedding dress, fully symbolic in its own right, becomes an emblem of the marriage state. It is not really from the dress that Marianne wants to escape as if it was a virus, but from having to marry "the King of Yahoos" (HV 61) the day after.

And yet, there is no escaping dress and marriage, which is made clear by the fact that even when the room is completely dark, the dress is still demonstrating its power, glowing in full allure (HV 68). When she finally understands this, and grudgingly puts it on, "the veil ... concealed everything, even Marianne's face" (HV 69), in a metaphorical message by which her previous subject positions are lost once more, as she accepts the present "ordeal" (HV 69). After all, it looks like Marianne will finally become swallowed up, incorporated, through the process of marriage.

The actual ceremony is, at the best of times, impressive. Donally, who performs as priest, provides an amalgam of different traditions to carry out the wedding, from the Book of Common Prayer to a ritual Marianne thinks must be derived from his study of Red Indian culture. According to this rite, Marianne's and Jewel's bloods are mingled, a physical demonstration that she is effectively incorporated, "swallowed up", as it were, into the tribe (HV 73). The ceremony reaches its climax when Donally has a spectacular fit, making him froth and babble and which, if not self-induced, is clearly performed (HV 73). One more time, the three motifs regulating Marianne's relationship with Jewel are present in this scene: the blood they spill and which, moreover, splashes her white gown, the

knife used to make a cut in their wrists, and the scrutinising eyes of Marianne, which decode the ceremony through the mediation of the narrative voice.

Again, the woman’s gaze provides a twist in the original plot of the tale for, as Gerardine Meaney argues, during the wedding Marianne “adopts ... a double role as observer and instrument of observation,” thus becoming “a woman who *observes* and *understands* her own function as *sign* and is conscious that her role as unit of exchange is an *impersonation*” by which she “disturbs the basis of society itself” (1993: 106, my italics). Incorporation into the tribe might seem effected, but Marianne is still looking, being an active agent, a spectator at her own wedding ceremony, outside and inside at one and the same time. In other words, she is no puppet in the hands of Donally’s twisted plot strings and, most importantly, she fully understands that the part she is playing is merely that: a part, a mimicry of her self. Thus, her self cannot be unproblematically “swallowed up” (HV 56). Paulina Palmer resorts to Irigaray in order to cast light on this issue when she states that: “Woman, Irigaray argues, by *parodically mimicking conventional images of femininity*, can expose their *artifice* and *inauthenticity*. In this way, she can avoid being *subject to male control* and achieve a degree of *agency*” (Palmer 1997: 26, my italics). The words seem to have been written specifically for the scene in which the reader finds Marianne at this stage of the novel.

Marianne “parodically mimick[s]” the “conventional [image] of femininity” (Palmer 1997: 26) which is the sign of the bride, achieving a “degree of agency” (Palmer 1997: 26) through what Joan Rivière terms “the masquerade”:

Womanliness ... could be assumed and worn as a mask. [...] The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the 'masquerade'. My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing. [...] In every-day life one may observe the mask of femininity taking curious forms.

(Saguaro 2000: 73)

Indeed, the fact that Marianne is 'masquerading', "pretending to be the memory of a bride" (HV 80), does not entail a 'genuine' self, as will be argued later. Nevertheless, this does not mean that she has the power to disrupt the (sexual) politics going on in this particular event either. In the words of Judith Butler: "if the 'being' ... is masquerade, then it would appear to reduce all being to a form of appearing, the appearance of being, with the consequence that all gender ontology is reducible to the play of appearances" (Butler 1990: 47). Yet, through the unconventional marriage ceremony, Marianne has become Jewel's wife, there is no play of appearances here.

5.5 Marianne Secularised

"She lived in this disintegrated state for some time, until, prone under his weight, she heard him growl into her throat: 'Conceive, you bitch, conceive' and was shocked into the most lucid wakefulness" —Angela Carter, *Heroes and Villains*, 90

Now that she is a married woman, a wife, 'adulthood' is meant to begin for Marianne, with every complication and potential satisfaction that this new state entails. The reader is made aware of her new subject position when he/she reads

of Marianne romanticising her Professor childhood, “encapsulated in a safe, white tower with unreason at bay outside, beyond the barbed wire” (HV 77). The portrait of Professors here is unrealistic and mild, just like her fantasies of Barbarians were childish when she lived in the “white tower” (HV 77). It is not the Professors that Marianne romanticises, but her childhood, the period of life which tends to be associated with a sense of safety and whereby “unreason” is kept “at bay outside” (HV 77). It is at pre-adolescence and beyond, that unreason breaks the barbed wire and raids the subject, whether it be through complicated social demands, or through a frenzy of hormones, or maybe through both. These two types of ‘unreason’ are experienced by Marianne in the Barbarian settlement. The stay amongst the Barbarians clearly points to that strange and complicated stage any individual finds himself/herself propelled into after the safety of childhood is lost, a stage which is especially dramatic for girls, as their corporeal functions include starting to bleed once a month.

Marriage secularises Marianne in the eyes of the tribe, who do not bother to protect themselves with the sign against the Evil Eye anymore whenever she appears. She has become ‘flesh and blood’ as it were and, with this becoming, her awakening to eroticism is achieved: “this third thing, this erotic beast, was eyeless, formless and equipped with one single mouth. It was amphibious and swam in black brackish waters, subsisting only upon night and silence” (HV 88-89). Outside this nocturnal “erotic beast”, Jewel is denied any existence, and his daylight activities, to Marianne, are none other than “sporadic *tableaux vivants* or random poses with no thread of continuity to hold them together” (HV 89). For a while, in her “disintegrated state” and her “triumphant loneliness” (HV 90),

Marianne is almost happy. Until one night, during one of their erotic nocturnal fights, Jewel growls “[c]onceive, you bitch, conceive” (HV 90), which suddenly shocks Marianne into the most lucid wakefulness. The shock of sex as procreation as opposed to sex as recreation is encapsulated in the words Jewel utters and, even though Marianne “would have hoped their breeds were so far apart a cross would not have been possible” (HV 90), he makes a point of explaining the need for her to breed.

Jewel needs a son to ensure his status. After all, there is no denying that the Barbarians are yet another instance of a society based on patrilinearity, as Jewel is well aware. Revenge, however, rates higher in his book, “shoving a little me up you,” he roughly asserts, “a little me all furred, plaited and bristling with knives” (HV 90). For Marianne, this is the last humiliation and she ironically claims that she will refuse to give birth to “monsters” (HV 90). Even when Jewel tells her she cannot leave, as she might be “incubating” his child already, pragmatic Marianne replies that surely Professors have remedies “for this particular malady” (HV 91). Leaving would have been easier, were it not for desire, which halts her steps, making her incapable of “[setting] her foot outside the compulsive circle” (HV 96) of Jewel’s magnetic field.

Pregnancy brings a new status for Marianne within the community. Although she has not noticed that she has been missing her periods, Mrs Green concedes that Marianne must be about three months pregnant (HV 128). The first person to tell Marianne of her new state, however, is the half-wit boy, with whom she is ‘unfaithful’ to Jewel when the opportunity arises. The reason for which Marianne has a sexual intercourse of sorts with the half-wit is vindictive.

According to the narrative voice, it “was the first opportunity she had to betray her husband and instantly she took advantage of it” (HV 115).

Intercourse with the half-wit is not satisfactory, and the impact of Marianne’s action comes, rather, from learning the news that she must be pregnant, to the point that her relationship with Jewel changes. When she goes back to the gathering after having had sex with the half-wit, Marianne describes the thought of losing her husband as “unbearable” (HV 118) and she wonders what is it that she has done “wrong” (HV 118) to feel an endearment towards him. Jewel notices that she is “in a funny mood” (HV 118), and yet, his behaviour towards her is also different for, “he absently patted her head as if she were now one of the family” (HV 122).

5.6 Marianne the Tiger Lady

“‘Johnny says to leave you behind, for the Soldiers to get’. ‘Oh no,’ [Marianne] said. ‘They won’t get rid of me as easily as that. I shall stay here and frighten them so much they’ll do every single thing I say’. ‘What, will you be Queen?’ ‘I’ll be the tiger lady and rule them with a rod of iron’” —Angela Carter, *Heroes and Villains*, 150

Possibly, the clearest instance that Marianne is now “one of the family” comes in the shape of Jewel asking for her opinion on whether he should kill Donally (HV 129). Before Jewel disappears for good, Marianne clearly begins to become the head of the horde, giving him her advice on important matters within the community. Together with her child, a most definite sense of power begins to breed inside her, to the point that when Johnny —one of Jewel’s brothers— tells her violently to shut up and calls her a bitch, she stands up and yells that she will not shut up, which makes Johnny take a few steps backwards, scared (HV 144).

Jewel's posse leaves in order to rescue Donally, who has sent a help message after Jewel left him to his own devices in the forest, following Marianne's advice. In the last words Marianne and Jewel exchange, she makes a bizarre declaration of affection: "You see, I did not even love my brother much. [...] And when I dreamed of the event, afterwards, which I did very often, it was only you I remembered. It troubled me" (HV 148). This touches Jewel "on the tenderest spot" (HV 148) and when he returns to the posse, Marianne finds that she is "dislocated from and unfamiliar with her own body" (HV 148). For the first time, she can see her reflection in the steamed glass of a window, only to realise that she is "*unrecognizable* to herself" (HV 149, my italics).

Jewel never comes back, by which Marianne needs to put her brains to work at full speed so that Johnny's plans to leave her behind for the Soldiers to get are not fulfilled. Marianne's plan will be followed instead: "I shall stay here and frighten them so much they'll do every single thing I say [...] I'll be the tiger lady and rule them with a rod of iron" (HV 150). This statement has aroused controversy amongst critics, who tend to read Marianne's last words as a premonition that violence amongst the Barbarians will not be stopped, even when she becomes the head of the tribe. As Pérez Gil has affirmed:

La narrativa deja entrever que las características de esta nueva sociedad que está a punto de crear la protagonista serán similares a la establecida por Jewel y Donally, salvo que el poder máximo residirá en una mujer y los símbolos de su sociedad serán feministas. (Pérez Gil 1996: 93)

Hence, for Pérez Gil, at the end of the novel there is a mere reversal of the binaries which have dominated Marianne’s tale to this point, a “desmoronamiento de una ideología que no hace sino dar paso a otra de signo opuesto” (1996: 93). This reading obliterates all the previous support of non-violent behaviour that Marianne has been making throughout the tale. In one of the most interesting episodes, that in which Jewel asks Marianne whether he should kill Donally in a public execution, the woman wisely advises him to do otherwise. She tells her husband he should set Donally free instead and, although she reasons that this is because the community still respect him as a guru, one wonders whether she would be in favour of a public execution at all, when she has been repeatedly critical of any displays of violence produced by Jewel and his brothers or Donally himself all along.

My argument here is that Carter turns Marianne into the “tiger lady” (HV 150) in order to advocate a deconstruction of a traditional identity politics so as to allow her a move towards a more fluid and liberating sense of subjectivity. If, as Aidan Day argues, “Donally’s patriarchal programme involves the maintenance not just of the unequal antagonism between male and female but of the opposition between ‘civilised’ and ‘uncivilised’, between reason and unreason, that Marianne in her own experience is busy dismantling” (1998: 50), it therefore follows that, by the end of the story, she has obviously completed her ‘dismantling’ of the binaries upon which her subjectivity as a female was initially constructed. Thus, she is now free to occupy a ‘third space’, a limbo of sorts where all the patriarchal figures that apparently ruled her world —father, Donally, Jewel— have effectively vanished, and she can occupy a fluid sense of self, free of patriarchal

constraints. In Mahoney's words, "[t]he end of *Heroes and Villains* suggests that, once empowered [...] this new feminine spectator might be able to *see her way* to an innovative form of fantasy" (1997: 83, italics in original).

I would argue that she can do this because throughout the tale, through the power of her gaze, her body and her thinking mind, she has been an active agent in the construction, exploration and articulation of her desire. Within Carter's narrative history, Marianne is indeed a turning point, for none of her previous heroines —Melanie, in *The Magic Toyshop* would be a case in point here— had managed so conclusively to break free of established roles. What the future holds for Carter's female characters —such as Fevvers, in *Nights at the Circus*— is inaugurated by Marianne's achievements within *Heroes*.

5.7 Marianne in the Third Space

Since subject positions can only be temporary, there is no essence or monolithic system of difference which can assign an unchallengeable status of 'other', 'object', or 'victim' to subjects. Because this discourse is at once grounded *and* ungrounded in this textual fissure, it remains unstable, always under 'insistent' and 'persistent' threat from 'a chaotic multiplicity of representations' [...] *Heroes and Villains* self-consciously occupies this indeterminate and chaotic cultural space, making it possible to realize a feminine sexual subject. (Mahoney 1997: 76, italics in original)

These words by Elizabeth Mahoney clearly convey the idea of the ‘third space’, the utopia to which allusion is being made in this study. In complete desperation, Marianne pines that:

When I was a little girl, we played at heroes and villains but now I don’t know which is which any more, nor who is who, and what can I trust if not appearances? Because nobody can teach me which is which nor who is who because my father is dead. (HV 125)

Here, she is making a point similar to Mahoney’s above. The difference between the desperate Marianne who utters these words and Marianne, the tiger lady at the end of the novel is not so much that the latter ‘knows’ which is which and who is who, but that she can move on from the ‘whiches’ and the ‘whos’, from the sets of binaries that dominated both Professors and Barbarians, heroes and villains, in order to occupy the said ‘third space’, a utopian location where denominations are no longer useful, possible or even necessary. If this Marianne is “unrecognizable to herself” (HV 149) it is plainly because there is no “self” to recognise anymore, after all the social disguises thrust upon her have fallen in the imminent disappearance of the ultimate patriarchal impersonation, her husband. Once the social disguises fall apart, Marianne’s construction of her subjectivity outside traditional roles must be initiated. Here is where the tiger lady comes into play.

Funny that the one to discover this move on from binaries should be a woman. Or is it? For Luce Irigaray, that the character who constructs this fluidity, this ‘third space’, is a woman should not come as a surprise. After all:

Whence the mystery that woman represents in a culture claiming to count everything by units, to inventory everything as individualities.

She is neither one nor two. Rigorously speaking, she cannot be identified either as one person, or as two. She resists all adequate definition. [...] ‘She’ is indefinitely other in herself. [...] Thus, what they [women] desire is precisely nothing, and at the same time everything. (in Saguaro 2000: 263, 264, 265, italics in original)

This is a description of Marianne at the end of *Heroes* at its best. She is “a mystery” (Irigaray 2000: 263) —for both Professors and Barbarians, although not for herself and, I would venture, not for the reader—, she “resists all adequate definition” (Irigaray 2000: 264) —the stereotyped ‘Eve’, ‘virgin’, ‘bride’, ‘mother’ prove clearly inadequate for her— and “what [she desires] is precisely nothing” (Irigaray 2000: 265): Jewel.

Judith Butler offers useful vocabulary to discuss the fluidity to which Marianne is finally subject. If, as Butler claims, “a position becomes a position as a matter of authorizing power” (Butler & Scott 1992: 9), it is hardly surprising that Marianne swiftly escapes all positions, for she also repeatedly refuses any authorising of power, both upon herself and upon those around her. Butler criticises “identity politics” precisely because they are “*never* merely descriptive”, but “always normative” (Butler & Scott 1992: 16, italics in original) so that whenever a term becomes fixed, such as ‘Woman’ for instance, it becomes “normalized, immobilized and paralyzed in positions of subordination” (in Butler & Scott 1992: 16). Becoming normalised, immobilised and paralysed in positions of subordination proves hardly an alternative for a woman who is always on the move, in the attempt to discover, articulate and satisfy desire.

Possibly, what makes “identity categories” so dangerous is that they are embedded in the cultural system in such a powerful way that they are offered as ‘natural’, and always related to the gender regulations that the identity in question is supposed to obey to. For Chris Weedon:

Gendered subject positions are constituted in various ways by images of how one is expected to look and behave, by rules of behaviour to which one should conform, reinforced by approval or punishment, through particular definitions of pleasure which are offered as natural and imply ways of being a girl or a woman and by the absence within particular discourses of any possibility of negotiating the nature of femininity and masculinity. (1994 [1987]: 99)

Likewise, in her arduous critique of what she calls “the metaphysics of substance” (Butler 1990: 11), Judith Butler argues how “[the] association of the body with the female works along magical relations of reciprocity whereby the female sex becomes restricted to its body” (Butler 1990: 11-12). It might be for this reason that, once Marianne liberates herself from the identities that Professors and Barbarians have been constructing for her, she feels “dislocated from and unfamiliar with her own body” (HV 148). In other words, she was brutally made to come into contact with her corporeality and it is only when she is “dislocated ... from her own body” (HV 148) that her own construction of her self can begin, and her identity can be articulated.

In her Butlerian tale of becoming and unbecoming (a gendered subject), Marianne has been performing “an incessant and repeated action of some sort” (Butler 1990: 112), in order to become the gendered ideal that Barbarians thought

she had to live up to. As such, “if gender attributes ... are not expressive but performative, then these attributes effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal” (Butler 1990: 141). That is to say, in order to become the subject ‘Woman’ one has to ‘perform’ as such, by which, Butler argues, the gender regulations determine the identity which they, initially, seem to be revealing. Hence, there is nothing natural in the subject ‘Woman’ nor in any other subject, for that matter. Following Butler’s arguments, it is all a question of performativity, for “identities can come into being and dissolve depending on the concrete practices that constitute them” (Butler 1990: 16).

Hence Angela Carter, through the character-in-progress of Marianne, is offering a subjectivity “which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse every time we think or speak”, the definition of poststructuralist subjectivity by Chris Weedon, as quoted above (1994 [1987]: 33). Marianne’s (re)constitution of her subjectivity is closely connected to her discovery of a foreign and exotic object of desire, an Other, which, as established, turns out to be no more than a “furious invention of [her] virgin nights” (HV 137). This stands as yet another indication that her subjectivity is precarious in so far as “the notion of this Other *in* the Self, as it were, implies that the Self/Other distinction is *not* primarily external [...]; the Self is from the start radically implicated in the ‘Other’” (Butler 1993: 316). If the Other is to be found at the very core of the Self, if the Self/Other distinction is not external, any notion of the Self as coherent must inevitably fail. As already cited, “[t]he foreigner is within me,” Julia Kristeva writes in *Strangers to Ourselves* (1989), “hence we are

all foreigners. If I am a foreigner, then there are no foreigners” (1991 [1989]: 191).

Heroes and Villains, therefore, “question[s] existing norms and the range of subject positions open to women by exploring different possibilities in futuristic societies” in an attempt “to show how femininity is socially constructed and how at different moments and in different social contexts women are encouraged to identify with different modes of subjectivity which serve specific interests” (Weedon 1994 [1987]: 104-105). By dislocating the context and settling Marianne’s narrative of desire within a futuristic environment, Carter is not only able to explore the social construction of femininity and how the identification of women with different modes of subjectivity has served specific interests, but she also offers a projection of the foreigner within the subject, a deconstruction of the traditionally-believed binary which separated Self/Other in order to argue for a subjectivity based on resistance to cultural norms.

Marianne stands as a clear example that “even when choice is not available, resistance is still possible” (Weedon 1994 [1987]: 106). And she resists. She resists being a Little Red Riding Hood, too scared to stray from the right path, the helpless victim at the hands of her rapist, the immaculate bride who gladly accepts her groom, the submissive wife who obeys her husband, and even the instinctive mother who is thoroughly linked to her procreative powers.

Marianne will probably “rule [the Barbarians] with a rod of iron” (HV 150). A metaphorical rod of iron which she will make out of her discursive power and through the eyes that she has been wisely using to learn strategies of survival in an unjust world in terms of the distribution of power. She is ‘Year One’ (Carter

1984: 285), in so far as she escapes definition and her personal utopian space has been created with a lesson well learned. All the patriarchal figures who have repeatedly tried to place her in a fixed (female) subjectivity are banished, her explorations into her unconscious are complete. Her future —and that of the members of the tribe— is obviously uncertain. All roads are open for Marianne and her baby, whose sex, challengingly, remains a mystery.

Notes

¹ In his article, Fernando Galván focuses exclusively on *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* within Carter’s production, as his interest lies on assessing how female writers re-deploy what he calls “el mito del descenso a los infiernos”. The corpus of literary analysis that Galván makes use of is extended to texts by Doris Lessing and Muriel Spark.

² Reference has been made in the section previous to this to the parallels drawn between Jewel and Heathcliff, especially to the coincidences between the two figures in that they conform the ‘Demon Lover’ type within the tale.

³ Lacan’s formulation of the Mirror Stage was first formulated in a paper he delivered in Zürich in 1949, entitled “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience”. A later version of this paper can be found in his *Écrits* (1977: 2-3). For full publication details, see the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

⁴ Although this would open another debate, the interesting qualities of the rape fantasy reside in its paradoxical nature: the woman who fantasises about rape does so, according to Nancy Friday’s argument, in an attempt to elude responsibility; however, by originating the fantasy in the first place, she is an active agent in its formation, by which she remains in an ambiguous position as subject of fantasy and object of rape at one and the same time.

⁵ Reference to the wedding dress has been made in previous sections of this study and in relation to the character of Mrs Green. The assessment of the garment and its symbolic potential is going to be slightly different in the present section.

6. **“We start from our conclusions”**: Tentative Conclusion(s) on *Heroes and Villains*

“We pursue objects which sustain our fantasies, but the origins of *fantasy* ... are unknown and can only ever be encountered as a boundary beyond which nothing can be said” —Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, “Death Drive (Lacan)”, 67

“We start from our conclusions” —Angela Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 191

[The half-wit boy] seemed purely and strangely surprised at the swiftness and ease with which Jewel had departed from life; he looked at Marianne questioningly and giggled briefly. The ends of his hair had set in stiff spikes of dried blood. ‘No more,’ he said and relapsed into silence. (HV 151)

Heroes and Villains proves the perfect scenario to explore what Linden Peach refers to as “magical transformations of identity” (1998: 160). Through the re-deployment of such ‘minor’ genres as the Gothic mode, the fairy tale, romance, and science-fiction, Angela Carter exploits Marianne’s tale of becoming and transforms it into a means of deconstructing pre-determined (Cartesian) notions of a fixed and essential subjectivity.

Marianne undergoes a journey into the Barbarian territory which her unconscious is made of. This voyage is, in turn, paralleled to a process of discovery which will allow her to witness how both Professors' and Barbarians' lack of corporeal contours irremediably brings about the mingling and final dissolution of their initially well-defined identities as 'heroes' and 'villains'. Amidst this dissolution of identity, the young girl will make use of an almost innate ability to shed all the pre-conceived ideas of (female) subjectivity that the two cultures constantly cast upon her and which effectively curtail her freedom as an individual. Instead, at the end of the novel, she occupies a fluid, unstable —yet liberating— subject position, one which is invariably open to endless “magical transformations” (Peach 1998: 160).

6.1 Lack of corporeal definition

“[Marianne’s father] had colourless eyes, like rainwater. His voice was thin and cool and his skin had a certain transparency [...]. Marianne loved him so much she only wished she could be more sure he was really there” —Angela Carter, *Heroes and Villains*, 10

Already as a little girl, Marianne has to experience a universe which is radically rationalised, deprived of human feeling, in which she is locked in towers (HV 3), pet rabbits are compared to grandfather clocks (HV 1), soldiers seem “mechanical, ingenious objects” (HV 21) and, even though she loves her father greatly, “she only wished she could be more sure *he was really there*” (HV 10, my italics). It is only when Barbarians raid the Professor village and bring carnivalesque riot —and relentless violence— with them that she understands there must be a further dimension to the world that she has not yet explored, let

alone experienced. This further dimension, although disruptive, promises sensuality, desire, and, most importantly at this stage, adventure. Marianne, the curious little girl who “broke things to see what they were like inside” (HV 4), quickly sets off to discover this as yet unknown, mysterious and, therefore, exotic place.

Little does she know at this stage, however, that her father’s words — “chaos is the opposite pole of boredom” (HV 11)— will be premonitory. If her life amongst the Professors had been punctuated by the wish to be more sure that her father “was really there” (HV 10), her descent into her own unconscious in the shape of an escape into the “beautiful valley of lush pasturage” (HV 31) that the Barbarians inhabit is going to prove no valid alternative. Already on their way to the Barbarian settlement, after the adder bites Marianne, she is astonished to discover that Jewel lacks steady bodily size, by which “[n]ow he seemed taller than the tallest of the trees; when he stretched out his arm, he could pull down the sky on everything. Then he shrank to a point of nothing and she lost him in the grass” (HV 25). Marianne’s sight is obviously affected by the adder’s venom. However, this reinforces her and the reader’s feelings of alienation during the journey she is now undertaking. Indeed, reference has been made in previous sections of this study to the importance that Marianne’s ‘view’ has within the tale, which is highlighted by the numerous allusions to her eyes. As her view is paramount within the novel, therefore, Jewel’s identity is effectively built on this initial lack of definite corporeal definition.

The tale of Marianne’s sojourn amongst the Barbarians is thoroughly permeated by descriptions of corporeal dissolution, mistaken identities,

performativity and masquerade. Although these issues are at best explored through Jewel and his capacity to transform himself into a 'villain' with the aid of paint, furs, necklaces, and knives, as will be seen later on, other characters also seem to display an unstable subjectivity in the eyes of Marianne. One of these is the 'mad' ex-Professor, Donally.

Donally's field of specialisation as a Professor remains a mystery throughout the tale. Marianne initially wonders whether he might have been a Professor of Literature after he wittily points out the analogies that her situation has with that of Shakespeare's *Miranda* (HV 50). Nevertheless, no sooner has she reached this conclusion, the reader sees her doubting again, and wondering whether he must have been a Professor of Music in the past. After all, he is quite a *virtuoso* on the organ (HV 61). This presumption, however, does not last long. After having a flick through his library, he is once more transformed in her eyes, and becomes a Professor of Sociology (HV 62). His seemingly easy access to antique clothing, however, make her speculate, once more, by which he becomes a Professor of History (HV 71). Marianne's successive hesitations and uncertainties about Donally's former field of specialisation make his identity as a Professor utterly unstable. This is effectively reinforced by the fact that the only agent capable of unravelling the mystery —himself— declines to do so, and this is precisely the notion that the text is aiming at: it does not really matter whether he was one, the other, all at the same time, or none.

If Donally's 'professorial' identity is fraudulent, his identity as guru is even more controversial, especially because the basic element on which it is based, the snake *Viperus berus*, is revealed by Marianne to be no more than

stuffed skin (HV 73). Funny that the snake should be no more than the postmodern idea of a snake, which turns Donally into no more than the postmodern idea of a guru in so far as his identity as such was heavily based on the power of the semiotic sign that he transforms the snake into. Once his paraphernalia vanishes, he loses not only his presumed magic powers but also his former wit for gnomic aphorisms, as Marianne notices after reading his mayday message with the simple caption “SAVE ME” (HV 143). Gone are the days in which walls were splashed with ingenious graffiti messages in William-Blake style.

6.2 Masquerade

“Fetch my jars of paint, watch me turn into the nightmare” —Jewel in Angela Carter’s *Heroes and Villains*, 145

Performativity, the power of masquerade, is explored to its greatest depth in the central character of Jewel. The following exchange between Jewel and Marianne, where she is the one to speak first, exposes the intricate link between masquerade and subjectivity. The link is so intricate, in fact, that the two seem to be described as one and the same thing:

‘When the Soldiers see you coming, they will think you are the devil incarnate, riding a black horse’

‘They are the devils, with their glass faces. One cannot escape the consequences of one’s appearance’

‘It is the true appearance of neither of you’

'But it's true as long as one or the other of us wants to believe it'

'You're not a human being at all, you're a metaphysical proposition'.

(HV 145, my italics)

In the above exchange, Jewel contests Marianne's surprisingly naive point that there exists a "true appearance", by stating that "[o]ne cannot escape the consequences of one's appearance" and, more to the point, that "it's true [appearance] as long as one or the other of us [Barbarians and Soldiers] wants to believe it" (HV 145). It comes as a little surprise that Marianne ends up describing him as "a metaphysical proposition" (HV 145) or, earlier in the tale, "the *sign* of an idea of a hero" (HV 72, my italics). Jewel's assumption is extraordinarily on a par with Joan Rivière's theory of the masquerade which was alluded to in the previous section of this study, and in which she articulated "Womanliness" as no more than "a mask" (Rivière in Saguaro 2000: 73). Nevertheless, Jewel, contrary to Rivière, assumes that appearance is destiny by which, much to his own dissatisfaction, he knows that he will have to play the part of 'hero' which also involves eventual death in hero style, of course. Further, if, according to his convictions, appearance is true as long as one wants to believe it, the obvious conclusion to extract from his words is that a void of being is found once the mask falls off. In other words, his subjectivity as a Barbarian is 'solid' in so far as it is based on his appearance as such, by which if the Barbarian appearance dissolves, he becomes nothing.

The text is at pains to deconstruct the notion of a 'genuine', 'solid' self behind the idea of a self, whether this 'self' be hero, villain, or neither. When Jewel washes his face after the wedding ceremony, Marianne thinks that "all his

features might come off with the paint and he would raise a smooth, eyeless egg of flesh towards her” (HV 77). Later on, she wakes up in the middle of the night and starts touching Jewel’s face, “[b]ut she had no sense of real eyes or a real face under her fingers. All seemed a small landscape from which she received only the most abstract information” (HV 88). Hence, once the mask of Barbarianism is washed off, Marianne discovers that the ‘genuine self’ is simply not there, an “eyeless egg of flesh” (HV 77). In other words, she learns that there is no other identity to supplant the one which has just fallen.

Thoroughly possessed by the power of performativity, Jewel seems to have the unusual ability to step out of the idea of himself, and thus to see himself from the ‘outside’. This notion is clearly conveyed in his description of his first raid: “[w]hen I painted my face and so on,” he explains, “I became the frightening thing myself and *ceased altogether to be anything but the thing I was*, an implement for killing people” (HV 122, my italics). Here, he is acknowledging the absolute omnipotence which the sign and performativity have in order to metamorphose him into “the frightening *thing*”, “an implement for killing people” (HV 122), in his own words. Surprisingly enough, within the narrative, Jewel is not simply positioned as another character, but he becomes a character also for the rest of characters, including himself. Here is Marianne’s warning when Jewel examines the possibility of going to the Professor village with her as a white flag of sorts:

[The Professors would] put you in a cage so everyone could examine you. You’d be an icon of otherness, like a talking beast or a piece of meteorite. [...] They’d walk around you carefully in case you bit them

and clip off your hair and take photographs of the picture on your back, a relic of the survival of Judaeo-Christian iconography, they'd find that very interesting. They'd take away your coat of fur and dress you in a dark suit and set you intelligence tests where you had to match squares with circles and circles with squares [...] And you'd be lodged probably with psychologists and all the time you'd be a perfect stranger. (HV 123, 124)

An “icon of otherness” and “a perfect stranger” (HV 123, 124), Jewel has no autonomous existence beyond exhibition, alien regard, or Marianne's teenage imagination. Thus, it is no wonder that, as the paragraph opening this section reads, his departure from narrative is swift, easy, and silent. Almost, but not quite, as if he had never been there before.

6.3 The grotesque

“[Jewel] pushed back his hair as if presenting her his face displayed upon a platter, a face which at that moment appeared of such desolate beauty so far from the norm it was as fearful as a gross deformity” —Angela Carter, *Heroes and Villains*, 79

The body which does not offer distinct, definite outlines may be deemed grotesque. For Mikhail Bakhtin, the notion of a “grotesque body” is understood at best when contrasted to the “classical body”:

Where the body of classical art is an achieved and completed thing — rounded and finished, with the perfection of, say, the Apollo Belvedere— the grotesque body of Rabelais and the kind of art which he represents appears unfinished, a thing of buds and sprouts, the

orifices evident through which it sucks and expels the world. (Dentith 1995: 67)

The key word in the above quote is “unfinished”. For Bakhtin, the “grotesque body” is “in transformation” (Dentith 1995: 67), so that “the inner movement of being itself was expressed in the passing of one form into another, in the ever incompleting character of being” (Bakhtin 1984: 32). Thus, in its “incompleteness”, in its lack of definite contours, in its ability to transform and pass from one form into another, Jewel’s body is grotesque. Even in its exceptional beauty Jewel’s body is likewise grotesque. When in a fit of rage Marianne tells Jewel: “[w]hat I’d like best would be to keep you in preserving fluid in a huge jar on the mantelpiece of my peaceful room, where I could look at you and imagine you. And that’s the best place for you, you walking masterpiece of art” (HV 137), she is declaring the difference, hence the ‘grotesqueness’, that stems from his almost unbearable beauty.

Jewel’s beauty, a “walking masterpiece of art” (HV 137), is an aberration in so far as it deviates from the norm, from the mediocrity of the mass. As such, his body is no different from that of the Out People, those who were severely deformed by the nuclear explosion and roam the forests and who, according to Jewel, “have poison arrows, leprosy, pox and no sense of pride, which is terrible” (29). During an attack of the Out People on the Barbarian settlement, the narrative voice describes these creatures with the following words:

His arms were very short because they lacked elbows and were unnaturally hinged too low down on a body curiously warped and out of true. His face was marked with a gigantic cicatrice and the nose had

been omitted; his nostrils were twin pits between his eyes. His canine teeth had grown into fangs. [...] Amongst the Out People, the human form acquired fantastic shapes. One man had furled ears as pale, delicate and extensive as Arum lilies. Another was scaled all over, with webbed hands and feet. Few had the conventional complement of limbs or features and most bore marks of nameless diseases. Some were ludicrously attenuated, with arms and legs twice as long as those of natural men, but one was perfect in all things but a perfect miniature, scarcely two feet long from tip to tip. (HV 109 & 110)

Although the excerpt begins with a description thoroughly permeated by a tone of repulsion, the second part glides into beguiling resonances. In their “fantastic shapes” (HV 109), the Out People are effectively fascinating. As fascinating to scrutinise for Marianne as Jewel himself. The description above makes repeated use of Bakhtin’s notion of the “grotesque body” (Dentith 1995: 67) in so far as one man has “pale, delicate and extensive” “furled ears”, another is “scaled all over”, and most lack limbs or even features (HV 110). In their aberrant, carnivalesquely grotesque forms, the Out People occupy an indeterminate space between the human and the animal, thereby escaping categorisation and definition. As such, they are destined to roam the equally indefinite space of the forests, a space beyond the social *loci* of both Professor village and Barbarian settlement.

6.4 The Monstrous Feminine¹

Marianne, who has not grown “furred ears”, is not “scaled all over” and has not witnessed the transformation of her canine teeth into fangs, is as alien to the two communities as if she were a member of the Out People in her own right. The girl, who has been witnessing the subjective dissolutions of father, surrogate father, and lover/husband, and who, according to the traditional tenets of narrative logic, is the main character within the novel, is also in possession of a Bakhtinian “grotesque body” (Dentith 1995: 67), like the rest of her fellow characters. Evidence of this is to be found in that she seems as unreal to Jewel as Jewel is to her, to the extent that when they meet, “her face looked so pinched and ghost-like that her companion [Jewel] suddenly *doubted she was real* and put his hand against her face to see if it was flesh” (HV 26, my italics).

If “a free woman in an unfree society will be a monster” (Carter 1979 SW: 27), Marianne is, undoubtedly, grotesquely monstrous. Her monstrosity does not come from her ‘self’, but from her freedom to discover, imagine and explore desire away from the social constraints —the “unfree[dom]”— of both her native home and her community of adoption. It is the exploration of her desire which transforms everything —including her self— into something unstable and at risk, in bringing the dark side of her psyche, the unconscious, into play. Desire is within her, “a terra incognita or the back of the moon” (HV 86), which acquires the fleshly manifestation of Jewel to remind her that the Other is in her, and hence the Self/Other distinction is a useless proposition.

Amidst corporeal dissolution, mistaken identities, masquerades, and unstable subject positions, all effectively brought about by desire, the conclusion

to be reached is that there is no conclusion or, rather, that “we start from our conclusions” (Carter 1977: 191). Open-endedness, which defies the inevitability of narrative closure, might be deemed a form of ambiguous completion, an ambiguity which, in turn, successfully escapes the fixing of any subject positions.

Catherine Belsey declares that “[d]esire is what is not said, what cannot be said” (1994: 76). Thus, it is more than pertinent that the novel ‘concludes’ with the half-wit boy relapsing into silence, as the paragraph which Carter chooses to ‘close’ her tale —and which was quoted at the beginning of this section— reads. This “silence” (HV 151), which very pertinently comes after Jewel has vanished from the narrative, inaugurates the utopian space where Marianne can construct her subjectivity.

In her effective open-endedness of the tale, Carter leaves open the debate with regard to the positively uncertain future of Marianne as the tiger lady within the tribe. What is certain, however, is that in her exploration of desire personified in the figure that Jewel is —or is not—, Marianne has successfully shed the paralysing, culturally-constructed identities which others relentlessly bestowed upon her. Marianne has reached a point in which her desire is articulated. Her projection of this desire onto the figure of the Barbarian provides her with a vocabulary to voice it. She has learnt the language of desire, which in turn allows her to let it go and abandon it in the subsequent perusal of further desires, hence Carter’s refusal to conclude the narrative and her granting Marianne with access to the third space of fluid, liberating identities.

This is a utopian space which will allow Marianne —and hopefully her child— to occupy different subject positions as they move on, avoiding pre-

conceived social constraints. It is a utopian space which, in turn, will prove a progress away from the binaries arbitrarily settled, a utopian space where heroes and villains are “no more” (HV 151).

Notes

¹ The expression “the monstrous feminine” has been taken from the title of Barbara Creed’s famous book, in which she uses psychoanalysis, feminism and film to theorise on the figure of the female monster. Full publication details under the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

IV. Literary Reflections II: Jeanette Winterson, *Oranges Are Not The Only*

***Fruit* (1985)**



1. Little Red Riding Hood

Olga Broumas

I grow old, old
 Without you, Mother, landscape
 of my heart. No child, no daughter between my bones
 has moved, and passed
 out screaming, dressed in her mantle of blood

as I did
 once through your pelvic scaffold, stretching it
 like a wishbone, your tenderest skin
 strung on its bow and tightened
 against the pain. I slipped out like an arrow, but not before

the midwife
 plunged to her wrist and guided
 my baffled head to its first mark. High forceps
 might, in that one instant, have accomplished
 what you and that good woman failed
 in all these years to do: cramp
 me between the temples, hobble
 my baby feet. Dressed in my red hood, howling, I went –

evading
 the white-clad doctor and his fancy claims: microscope,
 stethoscope, scalpel, all
 the better to see with, to hear,
 and to eat –straight from your hollowed basket
 into the midwife's skirts. I grew up
 good at evading, and when you said,
 'Stick to the road and forget the flowers, there's
 wolves in those bushes, mind
 where you got to go, mind
 you get there,' I
 minded. I kept

to the road, kept
 the hood secret, kept what it sheathed more
 secret still. I opened
 it only at night, and with other women
 who might be walking the same road to their own
 grandma's house, each with her basket of gifts, her small hood
 safe in the same part. I minded well. I have no daughter

to trace that road, back to your lap with my laden
 basket of love. I'm growing

old, old
without you. Mother, landscape
of my heart, architect of my body, what other gesture
can I conceive

to make with it
that would reach you, alone
in your house and waiting, across this improbable forest
peopled with wolves and our lost, flower-gathering
sisters they feed on.

In her poem “Little Red Riding Hood”, included in the collection *Beginning with O* (1977), Olga Broumas draws on issues which are similar to those Jeanette Winterson deploys in her novel *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*. The poem obsessively revolves around the relationship which is established between mother and daughter, where the main voice of the poem—presumably that of the daughter—refers to her “Mother” as “landscape of my heart” (ll. 2-3), a description which will reverberate towards the poem’s closure (ll. 41-42). The first verse contains a lament on the part of the protagonist: she is growing old, she claims, as she goes on to mysteriously attribute her state to the absence of her mother (ll. 1-2). The verse finishes with a reference to a birth which has not taken place, the birth of the protagonist’s daughter: “no daughter between my bones / has moved, and passed / out screaming” (ll. 3-4). Her presumed sterility, therefore, is what she identifies as the main reason for her growing old, in turn paradoxically associated with the mother’s absence. Already in the first verse, therefore, Broumas alludes to one of the issues which will echo throughout the poem: the idea of generational continuity, a *continuum* which is established through generational links between mothers and daughters.

The intense relationship between mother and daughter is described as starting from the moment of birth, when the daughter passes “through [her mother’s] pelvic scaffold, stretching it / like a wishbone” (ll. 7-8). A universe of exclusively female connivance is effectively constructed as “the midwife” (l. 11) enters a scene in which only mother and daughter had been featuring. The midwife helps the birth by “plung[ing] to her wrist and guid[ing] / [the protagonist’s] baffled head to its first mark” (ll. 12-13), thus allowing her to move

out of the mother's body without the use of such external agents as "[h]igh forceps" (l. 13) which might have, according to the protagonist, "cramp[ed]" her "between the temples" and "hobble[d]" her "baby feet" (ll. 16-18), two actions which, according to the protagonist, both her mother and "that good woman" (l. 15) have been trying to do for years. Here, an interesting aspect of both the mother and the midwife—a character which might, in turn, be fused with that of the grandmother in the original tale by Charles Perrault—is introduced. The ambiguous relation between mother and daughter is laid bare in so far as the reader perceives that the poem revolves around the feeling of nostalgia for a maternal figure who, nevertheless, has spent years trying to "cramp" her daughter "between the temples" and "hobble [her] baby feet" (ll. 16-18).

The description of the newly-born baby "[d]ressed in [a] red hood" (l. 18) reveals Broumas's choice of a title for her poem, one which refers its readers to a world of fairy-tale imagery and motifs. The metaphor that the author uses here is both interesting and effective, in so far as she identifies the "red hood" with the "mantle of blood" which was mentioned in the first verse (l. 5), the dress made of placenta which covers a baby the moment it is born. Hence, it is precisely at the moment of birth that the protagonist of Broumas's poem becomes identified with the fairy-tale character of Little Red Riding Hood, an identification which works at several levels, the primordial one being based on her appearance; she is covered in the "red hood" (l. 18) of the "mantle of blood" (l. 5), which her mother has passed on to her. Broumas lays bare the symbology of the red hood implicit in the original tale, by openly describing it as a symbol of blood. In *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1975), Bruno

Bettelheim describes the symbolism of the colour red in “Little Red Riding Hood” as related to “violent emotions, very much including sexual ones” (1991 [1975]: 173), by which the transference of the red cap from grandmother to granddaughter, as it is found in the original tale, is, Bettelheim claims, “a premature transfer of sexual attractiveness” (1991 [1975]: 173), and it presumably functions as the origin of all the conflict in Little Red Riding Hood’s construction of subjectivity through her confrontation with the Big Bad Wolf.

The tale of “Little Red Riding Hood” has many different versions, the most popular of which is the one offered by the Brothers Grimm, where both child and grandmother are eaten up by the wolf, but are safely reborn in the end (Bettelheim 1991 [1975]: 166). The literary origins of this tale, however, begin with Charles Perrault’s version in *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralites*, a translation of which was carried out by Angela Carter in 1977. In Perrault’s tale, the grandmother knits the red hood as a present for her granddaughter, by which the idea of continuity through the generations —re-deployed in the present poem— is effectively drawn on.

The next verses in Broumas’s own version further construct the identification of the protagonist with Little Red Riding Hood, whilst problematising it with potential multiplicity. The baby comes out “howling” wolf-like (l. 18), whilst evading, like all good Little Red Riding Hoods, the figure of the Big Bad Wolf, identified here with the rational, scientific universe represented by the “white-clad doctor” (l. 20) and his paraphernalia: “stethoscope, scalpel, all / the better to see with, to hear, / and to eat” (ll. 21-23). Although Broumas re-creates the words that the disguised Big Bad Wolf tells Little Red Riding Hood in

their original encounter, she attributes these to the possibilities which the doctor's gadgets might offer, whilst connecting them to the girl herself, who goes on to explain that she eats "straight from [the mother's] hollowed basket" (l. 23), an image which might refer either to the mother's womb—thus pursuing further the colour symbolism of red—or to the mother's breasts, from which the baby might "eat" (l. 23).

The scarce protagonism allowed the male figure in Broumas's poem in stark contrast to the earlier version is interesting to assess. In the tale written by Perrault, the wolf is portrayed very obviously as a seducer (Bettelheim 1991 [1975]: 169), thus emphasising the moral component of the story, by which little girls should not expose themselves to the possibility of dangerous seduction (Bettelheim 191 [1975]: 170). Further, in this earlier version, the male figure becomes multiple and, as such, Bettelheim argues, "all-important, split into two opposite forms: the dangerous seducer [...] and the hunter, the responsible, strong, and rescuing father figure" (1991 [1975]: 172), which, in turn, allows the young protagonist to understand the "contradictory nature of the male" (Bettelheim 1991 [1975]: 172). Broumas's interest in concentrating exclusively on the relationship between mother and daughter, together with her concern to create a universe of exclusively female identifications, explains the scarce attention she bestows on this figure, while it allows her to explore multiplicity as the prerogative of female characters.

Further re-deployments of common motifs which appear in the earlier tale by Charles Perrault are found in this verse. The grown-up girl remembers her mother's advice to "[s]tick to the road and forget the flowers" (l. 26) for fear that

there might be “wolves in those bushes” (l. 27). The original sexual resonances of such advice are brought to the fore when, in the next verse, she refers to how she not only kept to the road but she also kept “the hood secret, / kept what it sheathed more secret still” (ll. 32-33), where the identification of the hood with women’s sexuality and, more specifically, with virginity, is complete. Hence, the advice given by both the mother and the grandmother is re-located, within Broumas’s scenario, to a more social environment, by which the sexual metaphors of the Wolf and the hood are allowed to acquire their full significance.

The cautionary words offered by the grown-up women—in Broumas’s re-writing, a composite figure between the mother and the Granny—are followed to their ultimate consequences. The protagonist keeps to the road, and keeps the hood and what it sheaths secret, without sharing it with the wolves in the bushes. Instead, she “open[s] / it only at night, and with other women / who might be walking the same road to their own / grandma’s house” (ll. 33-36). Broumas thus re-works the myth of Little Red Riding Hood to transform it into a lesbian tale, where the protagonist of the story shares her intimacy with other women who might find themselves in the same situation — “who might be walking the same road to their own / grandma’s house” (ll. 35-36), and who carry their own “basket of gifts, [their] small hood / safe in the same part” (ll. 36-37). The protagonist proceeds to offer her lesbian desire and sexuality as an explanation for the opening, nostalgic lines of her own tale. If she is growing old it is because she has “no daughter / to trace that road, back to [the mother’s] lap” (l. 37-38). By having no daughter, she reckons, she loses her mother in the process, there is no way to offer continuity to her narrative of self, by which the composite female character

of mother-Granny is lost in the process. Her last words point, again, to this idea: “what other gesture / can I conceive / ... / that would reach you” (l. 42-45). In these final lines, she recaptures, once more, the female universe of multiple identifications which she has effectively been constructing throughout her poem: “alone / in your house and waiting, across this improbable forest / peopled with wolves and our lost, flower-gathering / sisters they feed on” (ll. 45-48). Hers is a universe where all the female figures are grouped into one primordial, multi-faceted character composed of grandmother, mother, midwife, Little Red Riding Hood, unborn daughter, and flower-gathering sisters, all tracing the road back to the protagonist’s identity.

Although *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* does not openly base itself on a re-writing of an already-existing tale, such as “Little Red Riding Hood”, Jeanette Winterson also offers fairy tales and fantastic tales as a *locus* where the protagonist of her novel might be able to construct her subjectivity, away from a reality which is, at the best of times, difficult to bear. As a lesbian in a Christian fundamentalist community, one of the main leaders of which is her mother, Jeanette needs to find alternative means to explore her desire and thus construct her subjectivity. *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, therefore, is a text which explores the difficult, yet intense, relationship which is established between mothers and daughters, where Jeanette, like the protagonist in Broumas’s text, also tries to find “gesture[s] [...] that would reach” her mother (ll. 42-45), thus laying bare its interest in the ambiguous relationship established between the two women. Amidst her conflicting feelings, she also tries to construct a place where

her lesbian desire can effectively be explored, away from the “wolves in those bushes” (l. 27), which might take a multiplicity of totalitarian forms.

In its interest to depict the intense relationship which is established between women—as mothers and daughters, friends, lovers—Winterson’s text, like Broumas’s, bestows very little importance onto the male figures. Jeanette’s father and the pastors within the religious community are used merely as secondary figures in stark contrast to the protagonism which is given to her mother and other women in the community, such as Elsie Norris, Miss Jewsbury, or Jeanette’s first lover, Melanie. This contrast becomes especially evident in relation to the main protagonist of the story, Jeanette, whose character is explored and portrayed in all its sophisticated multiplicity.

Finally, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* is, primarily, a text about the exploration and acceptance of lesbian desire, sexuality and identity. Although the story, as will be argued, can accommodate many readings, the use of Jeanette as a narrator of her own story, by which both her figure and her point of view pervade the novel, declares Winterson’s text as a novel about lesbian desire, where the use of fantasy is proposed as a means of survival in a hostile world.

2. “That kind of glorious perversion”: Jeanette Winterson in Con-Text

“[Jeanette Winterson] is the most interesting young writer I have read in twenty years” —Gore Vidal, back cover of *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*

Although the list of contemporary writers who have been profiled by *The Observer* is extensive, none of these has been as exceptionally categorised as “our greatest living novelist” or “the first woman with the gift to write like Shakespeare” (Freely 2000: 1). These laudatory comments, taken from Maureen Freely’s 2000 *Observer* Profile for Jeanette Winterson, are charged with ironic connotations which are difficult to ignore for those aware of some of the facts — or fictions— in Jeanette Winterson’s career.

The relationship between Winterson and the press has not exactly been a bed of roses. In an interview with Ginny Dougary, the author describes herself as “a person of extremes ... I either do things fully and extravagantly or I don’t do them at all. And the English don’t like it. They want everything to be beige” (Dougary 1997: 11). Winterson’s portrait by the press over the 1990s is definitely anything but ‘beige’, or so the story goes. She is believed to have shamelessly aired a passionate, yet painful affair with her literary agent Pat Kavanagh —

former wife of the novelist Julian Barnes— only as part of a publicity stunt for her novel *Written on the Body* (1992). When invited to nominate the greatest living writer, she is believed to have said that “no one working in the English language now comes close to my exuberance, my passion, my fidelity to words” (Wachtel 1997: 137), an assertion that probably provided the cue for many a sardonic comment about the author, of which Freely’s scathing denomination, “our greatest living novelist” (Freely 2000: 1) in her piece for *The Observer* above, is just an instance. The most polemical and therefore famous incident in Winterson’s career is still the one that dates from 1994, when the author and her partner at that time, Peggy Reynolds, are believed to have doorstepped and verbally abused Nicci Gerrard, the author of that year’s *Observer Profile*, a piece which succeeded in making Winterson completely furious (Freely 2000: 1).

Emphasis should be made, however, on the fact that Winterson is ‘believed’ to have said or published all the above, and much more. Although there is undisputed printed evidence, nobody really knows whether her polemical comments were done in earnest or as part of an elaborate plan to mock the British literary establishment altogether. After all, even though she identifies herself as the “greatest living writer” (Wachtel 1997: 137), she does not hesitate to declare her admiration and intense respect for some of her contemporaries, the list of which includes Martin Amis, Salman Rushdie, Margaret Atwood, and A. L. Kennedy, amongst others. Much naive earnestness, however, does not take an author far in the contemporary ‘showbiz’ of writing, even if it is done with a more or less comic spirit. As Maureen Freely tells us in the *Observer* profile referred to

above, “you have to learn to think and act corporate. If you don’t, it’s headline news and then the cold shoulder” (Freely 2000: 1).

The problem with becoming ‘a myth’ while you are still alive is —apart from the “cold shoulder” of the press (Freely 2000: 1)— that the myth easily becomes larger and much more powerful than the person you are, and it can end up colonising your public image completely. People who have met Winterson in the flesh, however, provide extremely favourable comments about her —without the sardonic tone, that is. Ginny Dougary, who interviewed the writer in 1997, describes Winterson as “warm and funny” (1997: 11), novelist Ruth Rendell counts herself amongst her loyal friends and does not hesitate to offer her Suffolk estate whenever Winterson needs privacy and seclusion to write a new novel.¹ There is a modest side to the author away from the public scandals, as she declares herself to be wearied by readers greeting her on the street and approaching her in restaurants, almost as if she was “a long-lost friend” (Dougary 1997: 9), and in her list of unconditional fans, names like Madonna or Julia Roberts quickly catch the eye of the reader (Reynolds & Noakes 2003: 5). Should they want to professionally contact Winterson, however, they would find it hard to get a literary agent’s address, as she does not use one in Britain anymore. Not that she actually needs one, considering her brilliant marketing qualities.

The publication of Winterson’s latest novel, *Lighthousekeeping* (2004), has allowed a determined and sincere review of her past ways on the part of the author, as Maya Jaggi’s article in *The Guardian* bears witness (2004). In the article, Winterson openly speaks about the way in which she was vilified by the press over the 1990s, and the depression which this negative portrait of her

caused. Winterson, however, never fails to admit her own part of responsibility in the process: “[a]bout 1992,” she claims, “I should have had an operation to sew up my mouth, and kept it closed till 1997” (in Jaggi 2004: 23). With the publication of her latest novel, she claims that this “dark decade” is over (Jaggi 2004: 20).

2.1 Winterson and Language

Born in 1959 into a working-class home in Accrington, Lancashire, Winterson’s parents were active members of a Pentecostal evangelical church. The mother, Constance Winterson, is always described as a woman for whom the expression ‘a strong personality’ seems to come off short: “tenía un revolver en el cajón de los utensilios de limpieza preparado para recibir a los vendedores ambulantes y a los testigos de Jehová” (Onega in Vidal & Gómez 1995: 108). Mother’s main interest in young Jeanette was to educate her in a profound knowledge of the Bible so that she would one day become a missionary. At the age of 12, the girl started preaching.

This early training was —pardon the pun— a blessing in disguise. It allowed Winterson to improve what she considers to be her innate skills to manipulate what she calls “this fabulous tool that human beings have refined over so many centuries into this extremely sensitive instrument” (Wachtel 1997: 139): language. “I learned how to handle language and the spoken word, and I learned how to persuade. That’s what preachers do,” Winterson declares (Wachtel 1997: 138). Although she did not pursue a career as a preacher proper, she took on a profession which shares the common ground of seduction and persuasion with the preaching task. The parallelism between the professions of preacher and writer is

drawn by Winterson herself, “except,” she says, “the artist does it in its own right, for its own sake, not for some higher purpose, not for God” (Wachtel 1997: 139).

Whenever she refers to and discusses issues of language, Winterson shows a deep respect, even a deep awe, for what she calls “this freedom” (Wachtel 1997: 139), and she declares that the duty of the writer is decisive in “pushing language forward because if it’s not developing, if it’s not growing, if people aren’t using it in unique and different ways while at the same time regarding its tradition then language is going to start atrophying” (Wachtel 1997: 140). One of the duties of the writer, according to Winterson, would be to rescue words, much like the narrator of her short story, “The Poetics of Sex”, who insists we should:

Never mind the poetry feel the erection. Oh yes, women get erect, today my body is stiff with sex. When I see a word held hostage to manhood I have to rescue it. Sweet trembling word, locked in a tower, tired of your prince coming and coming. (Winterson in Reynolds 1994 [1993]: 417)

Rescuing words is one of the writer’s duties, but it has a lot to do with desire, eroticism and, of course, with pleasure, as the narrator in the above passage amply demonstrates through her choice of words: “today my body is stiff with sex” (Winterson in Reynolds 1994 [1993]: 417).

At the age of sixteen, Winterson was expelled from her family home and her religious community after she was found in bed with another woman. Instead of repenting of her ‘sin’, as the community required, she decided to run away and earn a living by doing a number of jobs, such as driving an ice-cream van, laying corpses in a funeral parlour, or becoming an assistant in a mental hospital. Her

eccentric roaming in the labour market was put to an end in 1978, when she went to Oxford to read literature (Onega in Vidal & Gómez 1995: 108) Her admission into the academic world may provide another instance of the author's personality; as Maya Jaggi explains, "[h]aving failed to impress an interview panel at St Catherine's College, Oxford, she camped outside till they reconsidered" (2004: 22). After university, she worked as an editor at Brilliance Books and at the feminist Pandora Press, where editor Phillipa Brewster encouraged her to publish *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* (1985). This was a good enough idea considering that Winterson had already "established that [she was] unemployable" (Gerrard 1989: 13).

2.2 Winterson and Narrative

A number of instances in Winterson's childhood seem to have left an indelible print on her as a writer. As already mentioned, her early training to become a preacher is one of these. Another took place around the age of ten when, fumbling around in one of the family drawers, the young Winterson discovered her adoption papers. Far from startling her or making her upset, the discovery intensified her feeling of estrangement within the family. She proceeded, from then on, to think of the Wintersons as "people with whom I lived" (Dougary 1997: 11).² This event would also have obvious repercussions in her fiction, especially in her personal relationship to all things past: "I can make for myself," she told Ginny Dougary, "everytime I write a book a new and satisfactory past" (1997: 11). In this fashion, Winterson becomes "a writer who has spent a lifetime

reinventing her own past” (Dougary 1997: 9), forging a new identity for her self and her fiction in the process.

Pentecostal evangelism has also exercised a huge impact on her writing, especially through her extensive knowledge of the Bible. Her first two novels, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* and *Boating for Beginners* (both published in 1985) portray interesting parodies of biblical myths, which Winterson is obviously familiar with: “I dare say I know [the Bible] better than anybody else, certainly most people, and it is a wonderfully written book” (Wachtel 1997: 139). The use of biblical sources goes beyond the elementary recycling of the stories in a book which Winterson has avidly read and re-read so that the metaphors, symbols and rhythms which permeate the Bible are also present in her fiction. Again, the narrator of “The Poetics of Sex” strikes the reader when she admits that she can only describe her feelings for her female lover, Picasso, as “Biblical; that is they are intense, reckless, arrogant, risky and unconcerned with the ways of the world” (Winterson in Reynolds 1994 [1993]: 420). Desire is here associated with what is sacred, sharing in that essence of all things holy.

The constant reference to other literary sources in a witty and refreshing intertextual game—a case in point would be the Bible in *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, as subsequent sections of this study will argue—is taken further to incorporate a source from which Winterson is constantly stealing with relish: her own work. One of the most pleasurable games amongst Winterson’s readers is, precisely, to look for and find the quotes from her own texts which she keeps recovering for her new novels, in a literary recycling of sorts. The author uses words and catch-phrases over and over again in her narratives so that these are

finally charged with a specific meaning and specific status within the novel. Yet, Winterson shows the temporality of all meanings when the same word or catchphrase is used in a completely different context. A cliché is a cliché wherever it is found, but it can effectively be brought to mean something completely different than was originally intended when the context in which it is used is suddenly altered. In one of her latest novels, *The Powerbook* (2000), Winterson effectively comes full circle by embedding within the narrative the story of the Muck House, which critics Margaret Reynolds and Jonathan Noakes read as a rewriting of the author's first novel, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* (2003: 9-10). This may easily be the case, as "[b]ooks are always cleverer than their authors," Winterson suggests in a recent interview, for "[t]hey always contain more than the writer intended to put into them" (Reynolds & Noakes 2003: 12).

Winterson, just like the young protagonist of her novel, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, has always vindicated the centrality that reading and storytelling occupies in her life. Not only has she argued that she writes so that she will have "something to read" (Reynolds & Noakes 2003: 11), but she also explains how pivotal fiction was for her when she was a child using books to "mark out a charmed place and to save my soul" from the decisions adults imposed on her (Winterson 1995, "Heaven"). Elsewhere, she describes books as "kinetic forces. They did not write down the world, they altered it forever" (Winterson 1992, "Better"). "Alter" is one of the key words to understand the Winterson universe. For the author, all stories can be challenged, all stories can be imagined otherwise, and so all stories can be re-told and re-shaped to transcend conventions, as she proves in *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, the novel which will be the object of

study in the present section. Narrative, for Winterson, can be made challenging in so far as it fuses:

the densities, the exactness, the precision of poetry with the scope and the emotional possibility of the larger canvas of a novel, where you can use character, situation and place —however you use it, however bizarrely— to bring in more than you can perhaps say, particularly in a shorter poem. I think it’s important to try to bring those disciplines together and to see if we can produce quite a different kind of art form, quite a different kind of fiction. (Watchel 1997: 141)

Winterson, the “long-lost friend” of her readers (Dougary 1997: 9), knows that they will gladly accept the challenge that her narrative offers, this “quite a different kind of fiction,” for, readers “are more sophisticated on the whole than critics [...] They will climb with you to the most unlikely places if they trust you, if the words give them the right footholds, the right handholds” (Wachtel 1997: 142, 145). The reader ‘trusts’ Winterson in her fiction, which she accurately labels “that kind of glorious perversion” (Wachtel 1997: 142, 145), in defiant oxymoron. In turn, Winterson is faithful to fiction and to her own (postmodern) principle that “[t]he nature of a work of art is not to be a part, nor yet a copy of the real world, but a world in itself” (Winterson 1994: foreword to *Art & Lies*). Elsewhere, she has expressed how this “world in itself” has to be one where it is possible to find a new space and “to leave behind [...] things that you don’t need” (Watchel 1997: 143). The book becomes the place where one can find a certain liberation, “a sanctified space” (Wachtel 1997: 143):

It make take four hours to read the book but actually it takes an entire life. The journey that you make is not one of the clock: it's an interior one, and in it you travel through time, through space, through place [...] [The book] is itself, it's coherent, it's self-realized, it exists in its own right [...] it's a place where you can rest, contemplate, refuel and go out again knowing that it remains there for you. (Watchel 1997: 143)

Within the Winterson paradigm, a book is a utopia of sorts, and the purpose of literature is, therefore, related to this utopian enterprise, in so far as it seeks to "open up spaces in a closed world" (Reynolds & Noakes 2003: 11).

Winterson's fiction is particularly interested in expressing how subjectivity is formed within a specific cultural framework and system of belief, whether these be the heterosexual family, the church, England, elsewhere. It is, however, utopian in the sense that the views of outsiders are suddenly but subtly made central, a multiplicity of voices is heard, one which makes use of imagination and art in order to engage in a diverse, alternative and truly liberating worldview. In the author's own words:

the artist is something of a dredger: you have to let down your net and pull up things from the mud, from the silt, that are unrecognizable, that have been forgotten, that have lain disused and ignored for a long time. You bring them up and you clean them off and you look at them and you bring them back to the present where they can speak, where they have a place. I think it's a dual role of dredging and of cleaning,

but also of re-creating so that you are always offering something that is right for your own time, that is new in itself. (Wachtel 1997: 148)

The “things” (Wachtel 1997: 148) Winterson pulls up from the mud in her “best-loved and first novel”, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* (Dougary 1997: 9),³ the things that are “unrecognizable, that have been forgotten, that have lain disused and ignored for a long time” (Wachtel 1997: 148) belong to instances of her own life fictionalised, *mementoes* that she gathers, re-distributes, and tries to come to terms with, in the manner of moments of vision. She confidently “bring[s] them up”, painful as they may be, and “clean[s] them” (Wachtel 1997: 148). Drawing her own story in the present, it may speak for itself and offer a place of solace —“a sanctified space” (Wachtel 1997: 143)— for others who may find or have found themselves in predicaments similar to the one Jeanette, the protagonist of the novel, finds herself in.

2.3 Winterson’s Fictions

The autobiographical and realistic proclivity the reader is ostensibly confronted with in *Oranges*,⁴ is not found in later novels, where Winterson relishes in the exploration of what is purely fantastic. *The Passion* (1987, John Lewellyn Memorial Prize), “not so much an emotion as a destiny” (Winterson 1987 [1988]: 62), is obsessed with the repetition of a phrase which, by the end of the novel, acquires a mantra status: “I’m telling you stories. Trust me” (Winterson 1987 [1988]: 5 and *passim*). This highly ambiguous sentence is reassuring — “Trust me”— whilst at one and the same time it creates suspicion in the reader — “I’m telling you stories” (Winterson 1987 [1988]: 5 and *passim*). In turn, this

apparently simple phrase successfully deconstructs the binary opposition between fact —what is to be trusted— and fiction —what is reputed not to contain the truth. The novel is eminently preoccupied with revising conventionalities of which the aforementioned binary fact/fiction is but one example. It also reconsiders inherited constructions of gender, especially in the character of Villanelle, the first girl whose feet are webbed in the entire history of the Venetian boatmen. This is how the author describes her birth, using Villanelle as focaliser:

A girl.

It was an easy birth and the midwife held me upside down by the ankles until I bawled. But it was when they spread me out to dry that my mother fainted and the midwife felt forced to open another bottle of wine.

My feet were webbed. (Winterson 1987 [1988]: 51)

From this early moment, Villanelle is left in a curiously liberating state of ambiguity. Her biological sex —“a girl”— makes her incompetent to become a boatman; and yet, much to the stupefaction of both mother and midwife, her feet are webbed. Villanelle is a freak of nature, both female, for that is her sex, and male, for she possesses the condition *sine qua non* for becoming a boatman: her webbed feet will render her able to walk over water. Later, when she surrenders her heart, she gives it to a woman. Much later, she becomes pregnant by a man. In spite of her gender ambiguity, her androgynous nature, throughout the novel she is Villanelle, the Venetian girl with webbed feet and a French name.

Winterson's next novel, *Sexing the Cherry* (1989. E. M. Forster Award from the American Academy of Arts) takes her readers to eighteenth-century

London, where readers meet the Dog Woman, a deliciously grotesque character described by herself thus:

How hideous am I?

My nose is flat, my eyebrows are heavy. I have only a few teeth and those are a poor show, being black and broken. I had smallpox when I was a girl and the caves in my face are home enough for fleas
(Winterson 1989 [1990]: 24)

This “hideous” character (Winterson 1989: 24), however, has a noble heart and a foundling son, Jordan, who becomes an explorer. The two characters are not alone in the eighteenth century, as each has a parallel, a *Doppelgänger* of sorts, in the twentieth. This allows Winterson to offer a narrative which is intensely experimental, with highly digressive shifts in time, as she swiftly moves from the eighteenth-century characters to their twentieth-century counterparts, possibly because, as she has her narrator say: “[a]ll times can be inhabited, all places visited” (Winterson 1989: 80) in fearless synergy. Here, as in *The Passion*, the reader again enjoys Winterson’s interest in offering a voice to all those figures who are marginalised by a culture which does not accept those who do not conform to its norms, whether of gender or any others. The Dog Woman is far from the typical eighteenth-century lady —or woman, even— and she is well aware of this:

I know that people are afraid of me, either for the yapping of my dogs or because I stand taller than any of them. When I was a child my father swung me up onto his knees to tell a story and I broke both his legs. He never touched me again, except with the point of the whip he

used for his dogs. But my mother, who lived only a while and was so light that she dared not go out in a wind, could swing me on her back and carry me for miles. There was talk of witchcraft but what is stronger than love? (Winterson 1989 [1990]: 25)

The twentieth-century counterpart of the Dog Woman, although unaccompanied by dogs and by no means as huge, is as scary in her contemporaries' eyes, due to her interest in ecology, feminism and pacifism at a time when these are almost equal to the exercise of witchcraft in the eighteenth century.

The exploration of the collapse of the cultural constructions of male and female, and of masculinity and femininity, is further pursued in a novel which would confirm Winterson as a much celebrated writer, both at home and abroad. *Written on the Body* (1992) has frequently been read as a somewhat concealed homage to Monique Wittig's *Le corps lesbien* (1975), a novel with which it shares an elegant, yet obsessive, voyage through the interior of the body of the beloved. In the case of Winterson's novel, the beloved is Louise, a married woman who develops leukemia. Ironically, Louise's ailment becomes the perfect excuse for the narrator to suddenly interrupt the realistic narrative line in order to consider the physical constituents of Louise's body, and the changes which they will undergo subject to the attack of cancer. Far from a lament over the imprint of bodily decay, the mood of these interludes is poetic, even celebratory, of a body which, although diseased, is still desired, and still retains "a secret code" (Winterson 1992 [1993]: 120) written on it:

FOR DESCRIPTIVE PURPOSES THE HUMAN BODY IS
SEPARATED INTO CAVITIES. THE CRANIAL CAVITY

CONTAINS THE BRAIN. ITS BOUNDARIES ARE FORMED BY
THE BONES OF THE SKULL.

Let me penetrate you. I am the archaeologist of tombs. I would devote my life to marking your passageways, the entrances and exits of that impressive mausoleum, your body. How tights and secret are the funnels and wells of youth and health. A wriggling finger can hardly detect the start of an ante-chamber, much less push through to the wide aqueous halls that hide womb, gut and brain. (Winterson 1992 [1993]: 119, format in original)

The unnamed narrator is one of the greatest strengths of *Written on the Body*, as well as being the novel's greatest enigma. From the early pages of the novel, right through its *dénouement*, Winterson and the narrator refuse to disclose the gender of the latter, even though the plot offered is one where a triangular romantic tragedy is all-pervading. Louise's corporeal disintegration under the assault of the affliction becomes a powerful metaphor which runs parallel to the dissolution of the narrator's identity through the novel's refusal to inscribe its narrative voice within a specific gender. This refusal allows the novel to successfully undermine gender/sex certainties, although in a narrative which intertwines a profoundly lyrical discourse with a somewhat more detached scientific language, and which, to this, adds echoes of the Biblical Song of Solomon, the subversion of categorical distribution reaches beyond mere gender labelling. Winterson's narratological ingredients are mixed in her fictional cauldron, as it were, by which, come the end of the novel, the reader has

experienced the poetic possibilities of scientific language, the scientific possibilities of lyrical discourse, and the erotic possibilities of a disease when both are inscribed —“written”— on the (narrative) body.

The romantic triangle is further utilised as a plot device in *Gut Symmetries*, a novel Winterson published in 1997. Young British physicist Alice has an affair with a married couple, Stella and Jove, which allows the narrative to ceaselessly shift amongst their three different voices and, concurrently, among an amalgam of times and places. The “gut” in the title does not only refer to human entrails, it is also an acronym for the Grand Unified Theory, which physicists are still pursuing to this day. The metaphors that Winterson uses to construct the plot are drawn from intricate concepts of physics, but also from the zodiac, and even from the Tarot cards, reworked in an inventive postmodern pastiche.

Winterson’s novel *The Powerbook* dates from 2000 and, here, the reader discovers a new interest in the writer’s literary imaginary: the internet. The title already discerns an interest for the virtual world of web pages, with a “dot” appearing in a most unusual place, between the definite article and the noun. There is no need, however, for the reader to be taken aback. Winterson may have new (virtual) toys with which to expand her literary horizons, but her fictional interests remain unchanged. In *The Powerbook* she tells the story of a female narrator and her married female lover in a novel which is, like her first, still fascinated by love, seduction, and gender identity. The use of the World Wide Web as a metaphor within the narrative has been welcomed by such critics as Elaine Showalter:

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 e-mail. Instead, Winterson uses the metaphor of e-mail to discuss sexual freedom and power. (*Guardian Review* 2000)

And, I would add, to explore an ambiguous (gender) identity. This is an interest which the reader finds already in the first chapter of the novel, “Open Hard Drive”. Winterson offers the story of Ali, a girl who is employed to carry the first tulip from Turkey to Holland. Her mother is a wise woman who suggests that the best way to surreptitiously carry the tulip from one country to another without any harm for the bulb is to strap it between the girl’s legs. Mother does not take into account that Ali will be kidnapped and taken to a young princess to do some practising in the act of love before her marriage takes place. Thus, reminding the Winterson reader of the disguise worn by the character Villanelle, in *The Passion*, on the first night she meets her female lover, a game based on gender disguises serves as an excuse for a lesbian relationship where the tulip acts as a strap-on of sorts. The situation becomes farcical when the innocent princess, upon beholding Ali’s tulip, believes that this is the shape male genitalia is supposed to take. In the following quote, the princess speaks first, and we hear Ali’s thoughts between brackets. Ali is also the one who resumes the outcome of their meeting at the end of the quote:

’I have never seen a man before.’

(You’re not seeing one now.)

‘The stories I have heard ... the fleshiness, the swelling ... but you are like a flower.’

(This was true.)

She touched my bulbs.

‘They are like sweet chestnuts.’

(Tulips, my darling, tulips.)

[...]

Then a strange thing began to happen. As the Princess kissed and petted my tulip, my own sensations grew exquisite, but as yet no stronger than my astonishment, as I felt my disguise come to life. The tulip began to stand. (21-22)⁵

Jeanette Winterson has also written collections of short stories, a health and fitness book entitled *Fit for the Future: The Guide for Women Who Want to Live Well* (1986), and some scripts for the screen, the most famous of which is the adaptation of her own novel, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, which was broadcast in 1990 by BBC2 to great critical acclaim, winning a BAFTA Award and a Royal Television Society Award. Her latest novel to date, the eighth in her production, *Lighthousekeeping* (2004), returns to the issue of orphanhood as explored through Silver, whose breakdown is described by her psychiatrist as a loss of touch with reality. To this account on her mental state, Silver answers that she is “trying to find out what reality is, so that [she] can touch it” (in Jaggi 2004: 20). For the author, *Lighthousekeeping* stands as the beginning of a new cycle in her career, by which her first seven works of fiction “were part of a single emotional journey” (in Jaggi 2004: 20).

2.4 Winterson’s Chaos of Self Narrative

“I wouldn’t believe that *Oranges* is my life if I were you [...] I wanted to invent myself as a fictional character” —Jeanette Winterson

Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit is Jeanette Winterson’s first novel, written at the age of 24. In spite of the author’s youth, *Oranges* is an impressively mature text, which launches a number of issues that pervade Winterson’s writing to this day. This is one of my main reasons for choosing this particular work for my analysis, together with the novel’s obvious originality in terms of narrative structure and content. In my previous section on Angela Carter, I argued my choice to discuss *Heroes and Villains* in relation to the novel being ‘typical’ within the author’s output, in so far as it dealt with ideas and images which would be re-visited in her other works. I can argue likewise about *Oranges*, a novel that covers all of Winterson’s key themes according to the author herself: “boundaries, desire, time, identity” (Reynolds & Noakes 2003: 25).

Winterson’s interest in portraying how the lives of those who do not fully adjust to social norms and parental expectations are at once difficult and challenging acquires a mythical scope when the reader realises that this is not just Jeanette’s story, but the story of all those for whom at some point “life is a foreign language” (Winterson 1987 [1988]: 34). This mythical quality is reinforced by the novel’s open-endedness. By refusing to provide a traditional narrative closure, Winterson allows the story to outlive its covers, which fits in coherently with the author’s words above that although “it make take four hours to read the book,” it “actually it takes an entire life” (Watchel 1997: 143). Books can always be re-

read, the stories they narrate can always be re-lived, and thus new meanings are constantly being produced.

Traditionally read as a novel about the universal 'rite of passage', *Oranges* is primarily the story of young Jeanette and how she learns to discover and welcome her desire, which in turn allows her to construct her subjectivity beyond impositions from external agents. Due to the fact that this desire happens to be lesbian, *Oranges* has also received the label of 'Coming-Out novel'. Although the pattern and content of the story are clearly in tune with those of other 'Coming-Out' texts, I think it would be pertinent to recover Winterson's own description of *Oranges* as "a powerful novel that challenges the way people think and experience the world, that questions certainties and that invites the reader to see things anew, from another perspective" (1985: xiii). Indeed, the reader finds him/herself with a narrative which successfully undermines traditional binaries such as those between fact and fiction, putting into doubt any certainty about what may commonly be labelled as 'true', and making a case, in turn, for a diverse understanding of sexuality and the world at large.

At a first narrative level, *Oranges* recounts the story of Jeanette, the adopted daughter of a Pentecostal Evangelist family with a very strong mother and almost invisible father. In a narrative which is intensely permeated by an engaging sense of humour, we follow Jeanette through her path to maturity, in her complexly painful but affectionate relationship with her mother and with the rest of the women at the church. The story is pursued well into Jeanette's adolescence, when the 'generational confrontation' with her colonising and authoritarian mother is aggravated by the fact that Jeanette discovers that she is a lesbian. Pain

and suffering could have defeated the girl, had it not been for a couple of liberating weapons none of her fellow characters suspect her of having: an inclination to fantasise, and a compelling sense of humour.

Braided in with the realistic narrative, Jeanette proposes a selection of fairy stories which she invents and which allow her to temporarily stroll away from reality, in order to go back to it with detached and yet renewed eyes. In an insightful interview with Margaret Reynolds, Winterson explains that what she was trying to explain to herself when writing *Oranges* was, primarily, where she had come from: “I was trying to make sense of a bizarre childhood and an unusual personal history” (Reynolds & Noakes 2003: 12). In an attempt to forgive the overwhelming impact of what she labels “an unusual personal history”, Winterson goes on to define how forgiveness for her is related to understanding, which can be achieved through art, specifically through literature. Writing, she claims:

can put you in a position which is both *inside and outside of yourself*, so that what you get is a depth of knowledge, otherwise not possible, about your own situation, and a *context* [sic] in which to put that situation, so you’re no longer alone with feelings you can’t manage. People’s powerlessness comes from feelings they can’t manage, and especially those they can’t articulate. Being able to write a story around the chaos of your own narrative allows you to *see yourself as a fiction*, which is rather comforting because, of course, fictions can change. It’s only the facts that trap us. I’ve always thought that if people could read themselves as fictions they would be much happier.

(Reynolds & Noakes 2003: 12, my italics except where noted)

My reading of Jeanette's "chaos of [her] own narrative" (Reynolds & Noakes 2003: 12) in the shape of *Oranges* will make ample use of the inset fairy tales, for I consider that they play a central role in Jeanette's textualisation of her identity in her tale of becoming. These fairy tales allow Jeanette to see herself as fiction, thus escaping the entrapment of facts to become "much happier" (Reynolds & Noakes 2003: 12). In the previous sections of this study, I argued that Jewel was a figment of Marianne's adolescent imagination, useful in so far as he was provided with the position of Other, which in turn allowed Marianne to position herself as a liberatingly disorienting subject. Jeanette, unlike Marianne, does not project her desire onto such a figure, even though she becomes involved in two lesbian relationships.

In the parallel stories with which she suddenly breaks the realistic narrative and which, towards the end of the novel effectively colonise it altogether, Jeanette will find this Other although, ironically, it will turn out to be herself. Through fantasy, therefore, Jeanette inscribes herself, her identity, in the textual body and metamorphoses into a literary character, which allows her to acquire some distance from her predicament and so understand her contradictory feelings and, with them, her situation: to be "both inside and outside [herself]", to "see [herself] as a fiction" (Reynolds & Noakes 2003: 12). Understanding her "unusual personal history" (Reynolds & Noakes 2003) will, according to the author herself, pave the way for forgiveness. I will thus argue that Jeanette actively constructs a narrative in the shape of Chinese boxes to become her own textual Other through a process which will, in turn, allow her to discover herself/her self.

Notes

¹ This information is provided by Winterson over interviews with Ginny Dougary and Maya Jaggi, but it can also be seen in the list of acknowledgements in some of Winterson’s novels. In *Sexing the Cherry* she writes: “My thanks are due to Don and Ruth Rendell, whose hospitality gave me the space to work” (1989: 7).

² In her latest interview with Maya Jaggi, Winterson repeatedly refers to her adoptive mother as “Mrs Winterson” (2004, *passim*), thus establishing that the estrangement from her adoptive parents continues.

³ Hereafter, *Oranges*.

⁴ The realistic proclivity of Winterson’s first novel is only apparent, as the present study aims to show. In relation to this, see Susana Onega’s chapter on *Oranges* entitled “‘I’m Telling You Stories. Trust Me’: History/Story-Telling in Jeanette Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*,” in her collection *Telling Histories: Narrativizing History, Historicizing Literature* (publication details under the **Works Cited** section of the present study).

⁵ A stage version of this novel was made at the National Theatre in London in 2002, with director Deborah Warner and actor Fiona Shaw (Jaggi 2004: 23).

3. “Art and Lies”: *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* in Con-Text

“There’s no such thing as autobiography, there’s only art and lies” —Jeanette Winterson, *Art & Lies: A Piece for Three Voices and a Bard*, 69

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit was written “during the winter of 1983 and the spring of 1984” and, so the story goes, in the days of “no money, no job, no prospects and a determined dinginess creeping up from the lower floors of [Winterson’s] rooming house” (Winterson 1985: xi). It would be brought out a couple of years later, when Winterson was 26, and only due to the persuasive suggestions of Phillipa Brewster, editor at Pandora Press and a personal friend of Winterson’s who encouraged her to publish her manuscript. This first novel is dedicated to her editor and friend who was, according to the author, “the beginning” (1985: dedication page).

Upon its publication and in spite of the lack of marketing, *Oranges* became a complete success, its enthusiastic reviewers and large audiences bearing witness to this.¹ Critics highlighted its originality and literary quality, whereas readers welcomed the protagonist’s outstanding humour and wry irony. For Lynne Pearce, this sparkling first novel turned Winterson into “the popular face of

lesbian fiction” (1995: 147), whereas Jenny Turner’s review on Winterson’s more recent *The Powerbook* (2000) proves completely unable to escape the temptation of making reference to *Oranges* and its protagonist, Jeanette:

a small, determined, red-haired whirlwind of a creature, battling and winning through against the forces of darkness, like Jane Eyre, like Anne of the [sic] Green Gables, like Elizabeth I. Read *Oranges* now and you will still find in it the exuberance and the craft of a ‘jack-in-the-box’. There is so much energy stowed away in those neat, demure, little sentences. It will leap out and cuff you hard. (2000: 2)

Turner is much more enthusiastic about Winterson’s first novel than she is about the text she is supposed to be reviewing, which becomes even more obvious as her piece grows increasingly effusive in her praise of *Oranges*:

Jeanette is neglected ..., exorcised, deprived of reading, taken advantage of by an elder of her church. But Winterson does not wallow. She turns it all comic and redemptive. I wonder how many girls in trouble have found themselves sustained by that novel. I wonder how many girls in trouble read artsy books about serial killers and end up feeling worse. (2000: 2)

The review by Turner corroborates that the spirit of excitement with which *Oranges* was received upon its publication was still alive fifteen years later. Evidently, for Turner, one of the most essential values of the novel resides in its offering sustenance to “girls in trouble” (2002: 2), an opinion with which many may agree, though not necessarily share. Yet, this may be precisely the key to understanding the enormous impact that *Oranges* had upon its publication.

Winterson's is a text which readily caters for the tastes of a wide sector of the reading public, and which supports readings as diverse as readers, something of a phenomenal achievement for a narrative with such specific and openly lesbian content. The scope of readings that the novel offers, therefore, is wide, and it can accommodate a liberal humanist perspective, according to which Jeanette's experience can be made 'universal' and, consequently, appeal to all readers in its depiction of the rite of passage which entails becoming an adult,² to a more politicised, Queer reading, which would maintain that Winterson's design through Jeanette's narrative is to mould a subjectivity which is fluid and at risk, in its attempt to come to terms with desire.

Jeanette's predicament is one with which many readers may choose to identify. To start with, she is an adolescent who has to overcome a problematic and paralysing relationship with her domineering mother, but she is also a person whose faith clearly curtails her freedom to choose, an artist trying to find her own voice, and, most significantly, a lesbian in a provincial, working-class Northern town. For Winterson, the reason for the spectacular success of her first novel is straightforward, even simple: "In structure and in style and in content *Oranges* [sic] was unlike any other novel" (1985: xii).

As Jenny Turner's aforementioned quote affirms, *Oranges* resists the passage of time with dignity, although the text is also a specific product of its age. The 1980s in Britain witnessed a consolidation of Thatcherite politics.³ The atmosphere of somewhat covert repression, with the Tory Government's ferocious politics of privatisation, induced a reaction from left-wing activism, which included such social groups as the Women's Movement, green campaigners, and

the Gay Liberation Movement, among others. Amid this atmosphere of confrontational dynamics, the story of Jeanette, a Lancashire girl adopted by a family of fundamentalist Pentecostal Evangelists, who discovers and embraces lesbian desire, was indeed welcome by a readership eager to read stories that would present a politicised narrative, especially one which displayed such a humorous attitude. Truly, Jeanette's story is as amusingly told as its most unmistakable antecedent, *Rubyfruit Jungle*, a novel written in 1973 by North-American author Rita Mae Brown.

In spite of Winterson's pronouncement that *Oranges* "was unlike any other novel" (1985: xii), it is difficult to avoid drawing a somewhat obvious parallelism between the story of Jeanette and that of the equally assertive Molly Bolt, Brown's heroine, who is likewise adopted into a provincial, right-wing family and who, like Jeanette, makes an intelligent use of a cunning point of view and a witty sense of humour to prove to her readers that her inability to fit in might rest upon the intolerance displayed by her community, as opposed to her lesbian sexuality. *Oranges*, just like *Rubyfruit Jungle*, possesses a disturbing quality, as, for Winterson:

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. (1985: xiii)

With devoted critics and readers alike, *Oranges* constituted more than an auspicious beginning for Winterson. In fact, it:

enabled [her] ... entrance into the realm of the profitable and the canonized, and placed her in a legible relationship to lesbian desire. In wry tone, this novel signalled Winterson's fictional strategy of revealing sexual identity as a perpetual reinvention rather than a conclusive discovery; it also underlined how the invocation of the autobiographical can add a frisson of lesbian mystique to the critical reception of a text. (Nunn 1996: 16)

The literary and stylistic quality demonstrated by *Oranges* makes one wonder whether “the invocation of the autobiographical” was actually a necessary effect so as to “add a frisson of lesbian mystique to the critical reception of [the] text,” as critic Heather Nunn argues in the above quote (1996: 16). Nunn's words, however, are interesting in so far as they introduce one of the controversial issues around *Oranges*, which is the question of whether Winterson has made use of her own life as a source of inspiration for Jeanette's story, in *roman-à-clef* style.

3.1 (Auto)biographical Implications

“Is *Oranges* an autobiographical novel?,” Winterson asks in her Introduction to the Penguin edition of the text, “No not at all and yes of course” (1985: xiv). The ambiguity of the author's answer, the open refusal to classify her narrative, is idiosyncratic with regard to a novel which flagrantly undermines the concept of an exclusive, absolute truth, an aim which is heralded by the title itself.

The pronouncement “oranges are not the only fruit” is offered at the beginning of the novel as a presumed historical document in the shape of a direct quotation from the renowned and irreverent Restoration actress Nell Gwynn

(1650-87), the mistress of King Charles II, who, as a child, is believed to have sold oranges outside the Drury Lane Theatre in London. One cannot possibly guarantee whether Nell Gwynn's hypothetical declaration has any historical substance and, at the same time, one cannot be completely sure that the opposite is true. Not that it actually matters, for Winterson does not intend to be historically accurate. Rather, her aim is precisely to make a case for ambiguity by blurring genre boundaries, in this case, reality/fantasy or, rather, history/story, a task which will be further undertaken within the confines of her book and beyond. Why else, one wonders, would Winterson have chosen precisely the name 'Jeanette' for her protagonist, a personalised first-person narrator for her story, and so much obviously autobiographical data for her narrative? Is the reader dealing with an autobiography or just a bundle of "art and lies" (Winterson 1994: 82)?

The title of the novel has traditionally been a source of controversy for critics and readers of Winterson alike. In a recent interview with Margaret Reynolds, the issue of the title comes up when Reynolds asks Winterson whether it was invented by her or it comes from something else, to which the author's answer is surprising:

'Well, I don't know, because it's lost in a kind of prehistory now of conjecture and myth. It's a stupid title. It's definitely not a selling title, but it's become part of the language. Which just shows you you can persuade anybody of anything if you do it for long enough. I don't know where it comes from. I can't remember how I thought of it, all I can remember is that it came out of the idea —the central metaphor of the orange— but why *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, I really don't

know. People often ask me to explain it, but I can't.’ (in Reynolds and Noakes 2003: 13)

In her essay, “Laberintos de pasión: las fantasías narrativas de Jeanette Winterson” (1995), Susana Onega tells us that Jeanette “comparte múltiples datos autobiográficos con la autora: expulsada de casa y de la congregación, vendedora de helados, auxiliar en una clínica mental, marcha a la gran ciudad” (1995: 109); however, although Onega acknowledges that *Oranges* would unequivocally fit in the category of ‘autobiography’, one still cannot be sure of whether the novel is faithful to the life of the author or, rather, whether “los datos que [Winterson] ha dado de su vida a los medios de comunicación constituyen una versión literaria de su primera obra,” an interesting reflection that no other critic on Winterson has as yet made (1995: 109). Perhaps the best description for the novel might be Winterson’s, yet again, and *Oranges* may simply be described as “a fiction masquerading as a memoir” (Reynolds & Noakes 2003: 53), in a strikingly postmodern somersault. In the interview with Margaret Reynolds quoted above, Winterson underlines the fictional implications of the fact that the narrator is called Jeanette, and the confusion this choice of name produced:

In *Oranges* the narrator has my name, because I wanted to invent myself as a fictional character. There has been some confusion around this, because people have thought, ‘Well, it must be autobiography’. In part it is. Because all writing is partly autobiography in that you draw on your own experience, not in a slavish documentary style, but in a way that transforms that experience into something else. (Reynolds & Noakes 2003: 17)

The author goes on to explain the way in which textualising her identity allowed her to see herself “as a shape-shifting person with many lives” (Reynolds & Noakes 2003: 17), and how using herself as a fictional character was “not ... difficult” (Reynolds & Noakes 2003: 17). Thereafter, Winterson points out that other writers also use this technique, and she cites Paul Auster and Milan Kundera as examples. “Of course,” she declares, “when they do it, it’s called ‘metafiction’. When women do it, it’s called ‘autobiography’. Unfortunate” (Reynolds & Noakes 2003: 17).

Unfortunate as Winterson may find this situation, there are potential (auto)biographical implications in *Oranges* supported, for example, by the words which the narrator chooses to open her novel: “Like most people I lived for a long time with my mother and father” (1985: 3).⁴ Here, as throughout her tale, Jeanette never ceases to speak directly to the reader, in a confessional tone which intensely reminds readers of Pip’s in Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations* (1861) or Jane Eyre’s in Charlotte Brönte’s fictionalised memoir (1847), to name but two canonical examples. The first-person narrator is particularly useful to Jeanette, in so far as it establishes a close link between reader and character which, in turn, effectively produces an automatic sympathetic response from the former. Through the first person, the reader is invited not only to identify with the central character, but to become absorbed in her experiences, by which any hostility to her or to her actions is competently subdued.

Together with the first-person narration, a realistic scenario is firmly projected from the early pages of the novel, by which the reader is offered a vivid impression of the town and environment in which Jeanette lives:

We lived in a town stolen from the valleys, a huddled place full of chimneys and little shops and back-to-back houses with no gardens. The hills surrounded us, and our own swept out into the Pennines, broken now and again with a relic from the war. There used to be a lot of old tanks but the council took them away. The town was a fat blot and the streets spread back from it into the green, steadily upwards. Our house was at the top of a long, stretchy street. A flagged street with a cobbly road. When you climb to the top of the hill and look down you can see everything, just like Jesus on the pinnacle, except it's not very tempting. Over to the right was the viaduct and behind the viaduct Ellison's tenement, where we had the fair once a year.

(ONF 6)

This description provides the reader with a perceptible view of the setting in which Winterson locates her protagonist, that of a working-class town in Northern England, “a huddled place full of chimneys” (ONF 6), in a period between the late 1950s and 1970s. The atmosphere offered from the child's perspective is slightly claustrophobic, “[t]he hills surrounded us” (ONF 6), and, the portrait of the town is far from utopian; it is, rather, “a fat blot” (ONF 6). The description incorporates an early religious reference, clearly establishing the strong influence that Pentecostal faith has on Jeanette: her report of the view from the top of the hill, where “you can see everything” is paralleled to “Jesus on the pinnacle, except it's not very tempting” (ONF 6). The bathetic qualification —“except it's not very tempting”— launches a viewpoint which will be all-pervading in the novel, through which religious fundamentalism will be seen through an ironic, at times

seemingly light-hearted, lens. Apart from an effective literary device, the narrator's use of humour proves essential to textualise an intimate, intricate story which, deprived of humour and irony, could be deemed extremely painful. Humour and irony, therefore, act as a screen of sorts, allowing Jeanette to detach herself from the most disturbing elements of her personal story, whilst at the same time being able to bespeak them in a narrative which boldly refuses to disregard these very elements.

3.2 Confessional Modes

To Susana Onega, the conspicuous homosexual content of the novel would solidly position Winterson's text within the so-called Coming Out tradition, described as dealing with the "descubrimiento, aceptación y confesión de la propia homosexualidad, característicos de la novela lesbiana y gay" (1995: 109), and which, she notes, is firmly related to the religious theme in the novel, for "el proceso de maduración de la heroína pasa por la superación de una educación religiosa paralizante y represiva" (1995: 109). This relation between homosexuality and religion is representative of Winterson's fiction, which promotes, Onega states: "el rechazo de las leyes (humanas o divinas) que reprimen las tendencias naturales [sic] del ser humano" (1995: 110). Truly, *Oranges* could best be described as a Coming Out novel in the light of Onega's description, as it is a narrative preoccupied with the discovery, acceptance, and confession of the protagonist's homosexuality, in similar ways to E.M. Forster's posthumously published *Maurice* (1971). Coming Out texts present a subversive version of the genre of *Bildungsroman*, the novels of becoming describing the

process by which the main hero or heroine attains his or her place in society, serving him or her to construct a subjectivity according to —sometimes, in opposition to— the demands of his or her community, a process which usually involves a deep spiritual crisis of some kind.⁵ Isabel C. Anievas Gamallo refers precisely to the subversive qualities of *Oranges* when she observes the parallels which Winterson’s text has with the *Bildungsroman* mode:

As a novel of girlhood, development, and growth, *Oranges* inscribes itself in the literary tradition of *Bildungsroman* not only by questioning conventional images of girlhood and femininity, but also by challenging the cultural construction of heterosexuality and, ultimately, by providing alternative models of femininity. (1998: 119)

As Anievas Gamallo’s quote confirms, *Oranges* has many coincidences with the narrative pattern of the traditional *Bildungsroman*. The subversion of this narrative mode, however, lies in the denial to adhere to the ideological implications that dominate *Bildungsromane* at large, and which are related to the need to confirm a given *status quo*. At one level, this is achieved in Winterson’s text through the model of lesbian desire and sexuality which her narrative upholds. At another level, the subversion is made possible through the mixture of fantasy and reality in *Oranges*, which refuses to rely exclusively on the realist mode, a characteristic at the core of the *Bildungsroman*.⁶

The (mis)use of the *Bildungsroman* however is not the only subversion of a genre which Winterson’s text offers. A novel which draws on the autobiographical, told by a first-person narrator, and openly dealing with the protagonist’s Coming-Out process naturally tends to make use of a confessional

tone. The opening words of Jeanette's tale may be useful here in order to support this point: "Like most people I lived for a long time with my mother and father" (ONF 3), and the narration flows on:

My father liked to watch the wrestling, my mother liked to wrestle; it didn't matter what. She was in the white corner, and that was that.

She hung out the largest sheets on windiest days. She *wanted* the Mormons to knock on the door. At election time in a Labour mill town she put the picture of the Conservative candidate in the window.

She had never heard of mixed feelings. There were friends and there were enemies.

Enemies were: The Devil (in his many forms)

Next Door

Sex (in its many forms)

Slugs

Friends were: God

Our dog

Auntie Madge

The Novels of Charlotte Brontë

Slug pellets

and me, at first, I had been brought in to join her in a tag match against the Rest of the World. (ONF 3, italics and format in original)

This extract, which opens the novel, is of interest at many levels in so far as it anticipates both the mode and some of the content that the text will display. As already observed, the confessional tone is made manifest in singularly visual

ways, particularly through Jeanette’s listing of her mother’s enemies and friends which, at this stage, are also her own —“I had been brought in to join her in a tag match against the Rest of the World”, she states (ONF 3). On another level, the style provokes mixed feelings in the reader for, although the audience are offered the child’s description of the world around her, an adult focaliser is strongly perceived throughout the extract, acquiring an exceptionally powerful presence in the use of covert irony: both “the Devil” and “Sex” are described as having “many forms”, whereas there seems to be only one, absolute, form for “God” (ONF 3), for example. Likewise, the reference to mother putting the picture of the Conservative candidate in the window “in a Labour mill town” contains a wry note, which the adult focaliser introduces as a means of effectively ridiculing the mother’s attitude (ONF 3). Even though, as said, the adult focaliser’s presence is puissant, the general style of Jeanette’s first address to the reader, which makes ample use of very simple sentences, bears effective resonances of fairy-tale techniques —“She was in the white corner, and that was that. She hung out the largest sheets on windiest days” (ONF 3)—, which remind the readers of James Joyce of the opening the author uses for his *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), yet another tale of *Bildung* where religion plays an extremely consequential part and where the autobiographical coincidences between author and main character are no less striking.

A significant component of religion is the believer’s confession. In his writings on the confessional mode, Michel Foucault argues that confession is one of the most useful practices which Catholicism puts to use in order to discipline its subjects, a discourse where the operation of power can be easily discerned:

The Christian West invented this astonishing constraint, which it imposed on everyone, to say everything in order to efface everything, to formulate even the least faults in an uninterrupted, desperate, exhaustive murmuring, from which nothing must escape. (Foucault 1979: 84)

In this extract, Foucault draws an interesting analogy between confession and verbalisation —“to say everything [...] in an uninterrupted, desperate, exhaustive murmuring” (1979: 84)—, the outcome of which should be to expunge —“efface”, in Foucault’s words— all sins. Through the act of confession, the subject publicly demonstrates not only that he repents, but that he accepts the law which imposed confession on him in the first place. In other words, those who confessed “displayed themselves as compliant subjects, [and] in the process constructed themselves as those compliant subjects” (Mills 1997: 81). Hence, confessing becomes a means of submitting to a pre-established power structure, in this case, a religious one.

Nevertheless, as Sara Mills argues in her study *Discourse* (1997), faultlines are to be found even in these seemingly flawless and impeccable operations of power. In the process of confessing, Mills claims, possible sites of resistance to power can be produced. The critic provides an example which her readers might be familiar with: the type of confession which goes on in psychoanalytic practice (1997: 82). Likewise, in the ‘consciousness-raising’ groups of the 60s and 70s, Mills claims, “telling others everything about your life was seen as a way of reframing that narrative so that different causes and different trajectories could be formulated” (1997: 83). This allows her to conclude that “the

interpretation depends on the context within which the confession takes place” (Mills 1997: 82). Mill’s examples prove that there is a sense in which confession within particular politicised contexts may have empowering consequences.

Truly, Jeanette’s tale allows her to confess to the reader that she disappointed her mother and betrayed her faith by sleeping with not one but, at the time of narrative closure, three different women. For her mother, Jeanette becomes one of “the heathen”, “a child of the Devil” (ONF 23), as dirty and perverted as Next Door, who dare so much as to fornicate on a Sunday. By the second page, the operations of religious and maternal power have been exposed and undermined by the narrator’s deployment of a personalised first-person narrative and the focaliser’s somewhat subtle use of irony. By the end of the novel, the audience are content to see Jeanette emerging triumphant from her ‘tag match’ with a community which never ceases to see perversion around them, possibly because perversion is inside them. Jeanette has found her site of resistance to power through the act of confessing. Neither author nor character wallow. Thus, *Oranges* astutely becomes an autobiography which undermines the foundations of the autobiographical genre, a confession which undermines the main principle of the confession and, finally, a Coming-Out novel which clearly contrasts with Coming-Out novels, at once subverting its *Bildungsroman* characteristics.

3.3 Narrative Interrupted

Susana Onega alludes to “la riqueza del elemento fantástico que se entrelaza en la novela con el elemento realista” (1995: 111) to prove the last point

listed above: the subversion of *Bildungsroman* characteristics. In the midst of her narrative flow, the narrator, Jeanette, suddenly interrupts herself to interweave fairy stories which, apparently, bear little connection to the realistic tale she is offering to the reader. These stories, however, prove extremely useful, both for Jeanette and the reader. On the one hand, they are deliberately arranged to emphasise the most crucial moments in her progress, to the point that, without the fantasy sections, some of the comments offered by Jeanette on the realistic plane would not make any sense to the reader. Towards the narrative closure of the novel, the collapse of boundaries is complete. The only sign the reader can use to distinguish between Jeanette's identity outside and inside the tales is the difference in the narrative mode employed.

On the other hand, the fairy tales allow Jeanette to textualise feelings, doubts, and fears which she would otherwise be unable to lay bare in the realist mode of her story:

[Mother] liked to speak French and to play the piano, but what do these things mean?

Once upon a time there was a brilliant and beautiful princess, so sensitive that the death of a moth could distress her for weeks on end.

Her family knew of no solution. (ONF 9, format in original)

As this particular fable continues, the reader realises that the "brilliant and beautiful princess" (ONF 9) Jeanette forges as a heroine is no other than a fairy-tale version of her own mother, and the parable narrates the process by which Jeanette was adopted. Therefore, even when the narrator is recounting events

which took place on a realistic plane (after all, Jeanette was legally — realistically— adopted), these are offered within the confines of a fantastic narrative which subverts the potential linear progression of the story, thus detaching it from the realistic/(auto)biographical/Coming Out/*Bildungsroman*, and proposing, instead:

an experimental novel: its interests are anti-linear. It offers a complicated narrative structure disguised as a simple one, [...]. This means that you can read in spirals. As a shape, the spiral is fluid and allows infinite movement [...] I really don't see the point of reading in straight lines. (Winterson 1985: xiii)

As Winterson claims in the above quote there might be no point in reading in straight lines, as it has been proved that the human brain does not operate following this structure (Winterson 1985: xiii). In her attempt to elude the straight line and twist it, shape it into a spiral, Winterson not only interweaves the fantasy sections, but also makes direct and indirect references to a whole amalgam of texts, by which her work becomes a tapestry woven through the delicate fabric of intertextuality, a term which Genette has described as “tout ce qui le met in relation manifeste ou secrète, avec d'autres textes” (1982: 7).

3.4 Intertextual Games

Already in the first chapter, “Genesis”, the reader clearly notices *Oranges'* both “secret and overt relation to other texts,” in Genette's words (1982: 7), amongst which we find historical elements —the references to Napoleon Bonaparte, to whom Mother is compared (ONF 4); literary personae —Hamlet

(ONF 9), the author William Blake (ONF 9); references to popular culture — country singer Johnny Cash (ONF 16), and Hollywood actor Errol Flynn, whom Pastor Spratt is said to resemble (ONF 8). The most obvious of these counter-references, however, would be the direct allusions and quotes from the Bible—the Virgin Mary, for example, with whom Mother is “bitter”, as she “got there first” where the begetting of children without copulation was concerned (ONF 3), and the Sacrificial Lamb, the story of which corresponds to one of Jeanette’s earliest memories (ONF 4). Likewise, Mother is described as constantly quoting from the Scriptures: “‘Vengeance is mine said the Lord’ boomed through the wall into the kitchen” (ONF 4).⁷ The Bible becomes a very vivid presence throughout the novel, one which is particularly felt at a structural level, as all the chapter titles are borrowed from the Holy Scriptures.⁸

Intertextuality, however, is not limited to biblical parameters, as has been argued above, and allusion is extended to a wide range of texts and artists. Jeanette makes constant reference in her tale to those historical and literary figures who, in one way or another, jeopardised the status quo. Hence, Oscar Wilde, Charlotte Brontë, and Christina Rossetti are considered as antecedents for Jeanette’s literary and sexual identity, and her own text’s dialogic relationship to Thomas Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur* and Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* provides a sense of alternative realities to Bible teachings.⁹

For Winterson and her narrator alike, the only conceivable way of representing the world and offering a picture as complete as possible is by making reference to the mixture of elements which compose it, in a pastiche which may include Errol Flynn and the Virgin Mary, Johnny Cash and Hamlet. A partial view

like Mother’s, entirely dominated by Pentecostal Evangelism, is a poor view. ‘Realistic’ as it may be, it is not ‘real’.

This tapestry of allusions which conforms Jeanette’s textualisation of her experience adjusts to what Linda Hutcheon describes as a “clashing of various possible discourses of narrative representation,” which is, Hutcheon claims:

one way of signalling the postmodern use and abuse of convention that works to ‘de-doxify’ any sense of the seamlessness of the join between the natural and the cultural, the world and the text, thereby making us aware of the irreducible ideological nature of every representation —of past or present. (Hutcheon 1995 [1989]: 53)

And thereby, Hutcheon adds, “challenging the seamless quality of the history/fiction (or world/art) join implied by realist narrative” (1995 [1989]: 53). By laying bare the references to the “irreducible ideological nature of every representation”, postmodernist fiction, Hutcheon argues, invites its readers to question “the process by which we represent our selves [sic] and our world to ourselves and to become aware of the means by which we *make* sense of and *construct* order out of experience in our particular culture” (Hutcheon 1995 [1989]: 53-54, italics in original). Representation cannot be avoided, but it can be explained. Hutcheon’s rendering of the way in which representation of the past has been dealt with is of interest to the readers of *Oranges*:

The issue of representation in both fiction and history has usually been dealt with in epistemological terms, in terms of how we know the past. The past is not something to be escaped, avoided or controlled. [...] The past is something with which we must come to terms and such a

confrontation involves an acknowledgement of limitation as well as power [...] In a very real sense, postmodernism reveals a desire to understand present culture as the product of previous representations.

(1995 [1989]: 57-58)

Oranges is one of the (postmodern) ways in which Jeanette comes to terms with the past and acknowledges it, understanding her present in the process of verbalising and comprehending her representation of the past. In her enterprise, any reference will be useful, as long as it is shaped through her particular lens, as long as it is assimilated, and therefore understood by her. Hutcheon agrees that the narrator's agency is of the utmost importance in representations of the past for, as she argues, "[f]acts do not speak for themselves in either form or narrative: the tellers speak for them, making these fragments of the past into a discursive whole" (1995 [1989]: 239). Without the teller, therefore, there is no "discursive whole", as facts, by themselves, are incapable of *producing* meaning.

3.5 Telling (Hi)stories, Telling (Her)story

The central chapter of *Oranges* proffers a philosophical consideration on issues of representation and the nature of history, fiction, and understanding, which echoes Hutcheon's words above, and which clearly anticipates some of the fundamental issues in Winterson's later work.¹⁰ "Deuteronomy, the last book of the law", takes its name from the fifth book of the Old Testament, a text which is familiar to Jeanette, as she learnt to read from it (ONF 15). Here, however, the voice that the reader hears is not that of young Jeanette, and the contents of this

chapter bear little resemblance to those in “Deuteronomy”, where the Ten Commandments are restated and the final events in the life of Moses are told.

The main voice in this chapter is that of an informed, adult, slightly interfering narrator who has already reached her own conclusions on the issues she is discussing, and who does not hesitate to give her own opinion in a characteristically assertive manner. Here is an example: “when I look at a history book and think of the imaginative effort it has taken to squeeze this oozing world between two boards and typeset, I am astonished” (ONF 93).

The distance between young Jeanette and this adult narrator is established from the first words of this highly referential and intricate chapter: “Time is a great deadener” (ONF 91). With the temporal perspective on her side, the adult narrator can carry out her aim, which is to blur the binaries constructed around the terms ‘story’ and ‘history’, especially as far as the question of ‘truth’ is concerned: “Everyone who tells a story tells it differently, just to remind us that everybody sees it differently” (ONF 91). Point of view, then, is all-important when it comes to narratives, by which, the narrator argues, history is as far from objective as stories, by which she proposes that the former should be taken less seriously and, rather, “be a hammock for swinging and a game for playing, the way cats play. Claw it, chew it, rearrange it and at bedtime it’s still a ball of string full of knots” (ONF 91).

And yet, people like to believe that history is no game, no “string full of knots”, but, rather, something serious that they like to maintain in fierce opposition to stories so that “they know what to believe and what not to believe” (ONF 91). The narrator’s opinion is that people forget that history is always told

in a way that maintains pervading power structures so that deleting past events to tell a version of history is like playing Pol Pot, the Cambodian communist politician and leader of the Khmer Rouge guerrilla organisation, who “decided to dispense with the past altogether. To dispense with the sham of treating the past with objective respect” (ONF 92).

Stories, in their promotion of a fantasy which is inherent to them, flee from the deceptive sense of security which history offers and, in doing so, propose an alternative which may provide a sense of balance: “There is an order and balance to be found in stories” (ONF 93). These words acquire a unique significance in a novel in which storytelling provides the key to understanding the heroine’s progress, a novel which uses storytelling “as a way to relate to prevailing cultural ideologies and to achieve self-understanding and self-explanation in/and/or against them” (Anievas Gamallo 1998: 119).¹¹

The narrator then glides into a somewhat surrealistic but effective correspondence between digesting and understanding. She advises her readers that they should have some control over what goes into their mind, in the same way that they meticulously control what goes into their digestive system. Surely, she claims, this is a much healthier attitude than constantly “eating out” and being unable to check what sort of products we are ingesting:

If you always eat out you can never be sure what’s going in, and received information is nobody’s exercise.

Rotten and rotting.

Here is some advice. If you want to keep your own teeth, make your own sandwiches. (ONF 93)

The metaphor is effective. If a single rendition of events offered as history is accepted as supreme —“If you always eat out”—, the understanding of the world will be likewise ‘digested’, that is, restricted —“you can never be sure of what’s going in, [...] Rotten and rotting” (ONF 93). By contrast, if we “make [our] own sandwiches”, that is, if we gather our own view from a multiplicity of perspectives and versions, we will finally have some control over the products which make the stories, over the ‘ingredients’, as it were. If we still lose our teeth, it will be of our own making.

This discussion, with its interest in “challenging the seamless quality of the history/fiction (or world/art) join implied by realist narrative” (1989 [1995]: 235), as in Hutcheon’s observation stated above, casts further light on the ways in which Winterson gathers a multiplicity of sources —from the Bible to fairy tales— and genres —from the confessional to the Coming Out— in order to construct a story which could have been rendered in simplistic, straightforward, realistic ways. Jeanette’s need to find and embrace a positive subjectivity for herself, however, is far from simplistic.

Right in the middle of her story, in a most difficult moment for Jeanette — she has just discovered lesbian intimacy—, the adult narrator who has time, “the great deadener”, on her side, comes to offer words of solace. If her advice is followed, even those books which seem to hold the greatest and strongest of authorities, such as the Bible, may be challenged by our own interpretation of the events reported in them. It is therefore a question of survival, not just of keeping your own teeth, to be brave enough to discern and believe in one’s own interpretation of hi/stories.

Oranges, therefore, is concerned with the nature of reality, and how reality is perceived *from* a given subject position. Further, it sets out to demonstrate that with the metamorphosis of the subject, reality is also seen to change. Hence, the reader finds a new Jeanette at the end of the novel. The traditional view of reality as unchanging or solid is effectively jeopardised by the fantasy sections which, at the beginning, stand as mere interruptions of the realist narrative flow but, little by little, they end up colonising the text altogether. Through the unexpected shifts from the realistic mode to the fantasy sections, Winterson is obviously transgressing genre boundaries, but she is also offering a story the understanding of which may remain ambiguous.

Through the introduction of the fantasy sections, Winterson allows meaning to become multiple and to shift continually, thus evading regulation and fixing. An absolute interpretation of Jeanette's story is useless, and the ambiguity of her experience and of her perception of it is highlighted throughout the text. The intertextual allusions referred to above help to make this feeling more obvious: further levels of meaning keep on being added in endless dialogism. Winterson's interest in transgressing pre-established boundaries ties in with her resistance to encapsulate her narrative within formal closure. Hence, the story rejects limitation; on the contrary, open endedness suggests that it continues beyond the covers of the book.

In her Introduction to the novel, Winterson tells her readers that "Oranges is a comforting novel" (1985: xiv), for it deals with "emotions and confrontations that none of us can avoid. First love, loss, grief, rage and above all courage" (1985: xiv). The courage Jeanette displays is not so much that which involves

Coming Out as a lesbian in a community which demonises homosexuals, but to be able to come to terms and accept her own interpretation of love, loss, sexuality, desire and subjectivity far from the constraints imposed by her mother and her faith. The novel, as Winterson says, is comforting, “not because it offers any easy answers but because it tackles difficult questions” (1985: xiv). Jeanette’s quest involves the realisation that difficult questions may have many different answers, all equally fair for, ultimately, living in a world which accepts that oranges may not be the only fruit is a recognition of the true challenge of life.

Notes

¹ Scholarly articles on *Oranges* tend to include references to the novel's success upon its publication. See, for instance, G. Lainsbury's "Hubris and the Young Author: The Problem of the Introduction to *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*," in *Notes on Contemporary Literature* (1992); and R. O'Rourke's "Fingers in the Fruit Basket: A Feminist Reading of Winterson's *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*," in *Feminist Criticism: Theory and Practice*, edited by Susan Sellers in 1991. Full publication details of these texts can be found under the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

² It will be the aim of the next section of the present study ("Girl Catchers and Porno Turn-Ons": Lesbian Desire in Con-Text) to offer an assessment of this particular reading of the novel.

³ Winterson debated the 80s, which she described as "the decade of the Big Lie", in her article "Revolting Bodies", published in *New Statesman and Society*. For full publication details, see the **Works Cited** section of this study.

⁴ All the quotes from *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* will be taken from the 1985 Vintage Books edition and will be marked ONF in the corpus of this study.

⁵ The study *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*, by Jerome Buckley offers interesting insights in this particular narrative genre. Full publication details in the **Works Cited** section of this study.

⁶ Further reference to the subversion of the *Bildungsroman* mode in *Oranges* will be made in subsequent sections of this study.

⁷ This particular quote is from Romans (12:19) and in the original reads: "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord".

⁸ The biblical pattern follows a linear and straightforward progression: chapter 1: "Genesis", chapter 2: "Exodus", chapter 3: "Leviticus", chapter 4: "Numbers", chapter 5: "Deuteronomy", chapter 6: "Joshua", chapter 7: "Judges", and chapter 8: "Ruth". This choice is not accidental, there is a close relation between the chapters in the Bible and those in the present text, as far as content is concerned. More on this in subsequent sections of this study.

⁹ Although Oscar Wilde's homosexual identity is well known, the references to Charlotte Brontë and Christina Rossetti might need clarification. On the one hand, Charlotte Brontë's passionate friendship with her friend Ellen Nussey is considered by some historians to have been of a lesbian nature, and Christina Rossetti's famous poem *Goblin Market* accommodates a lesbian reading which is not far-fetched. In relation to this, see

Faderman (1981 [1991]). The dialogic relation of *Oranges* to Malory and Brontë will be the object of debate in subsequent sections of this study.

¹⁰ Both *Sexing the Cherry* and *The Passion* deal with representations of history through storytelling.

¹¹ The novel’s interest in underlining the importance of stories and the ways in which history may be metamorphosed into a game is revealed at the very beginning, through the epigraphs which Winterson introduces. On the one hand, the reader finds a quote from Mrs Beeton’s cookery book, *The Making of Marmalade*, whereas the next page contains Nell Gwynn’s presumed motto “oranges are not the only fruit”. Isabella Beeton’s words, on the one hand, may really be from her cookery book, whereas Gwynn’s might be an invention on the part of the writer. This game of true and false references reinforces the contingency at the core of the narrative, and an interesting point is made about fiction and the lesser importance it is traditionally given. In Winterson, both Beeton and Gwynn are equally useful references with which to begin Jeanette’s tale; whether they be true or not is of little relevance.

4. 'Girl-Catchers and Porno Turn-Ons': Lesbian Desire in Con-Text

"The world is full of blind people. They don't see Picasso [a woman] and me dignified in our love. They see perverts, inverts, tribades, homosexuals. They see circus freaks and Satan worshippers, girl-catchers and porno turn-ons" —Jeanette Winterson, "The Poetics of Sex", 412

The narrative construction and contents of *Oranges* clearly locate it as a novel openly concerned with the protagonist's discovery and acceptance of lesbian desire. Nevertheless, upon the novel's publication, some critics chose to subtly nullify this obvious lesbian issue, thus promoting a condition which Terry Castle summarises in the introduction to her study, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (1993):

When it comes to lesbians [...] many people have trouble seeing what's in front of them. The lesbian remains a kind of 'ghost effect' in the cinema world of modern life: elusive, vaporous, difficult to spot—even when she is there, in plain view, mortal and magnificent, at the center of the screen. Some may even deny that she exists at all. (1993:

2)

Even though Castle's account of the status of lesbians as "elusive, vaporous, difficult to spot" is located within what she describes as "the cinema world of modern life", her reference to some viewers' denial to acknowledge "that [the lesbian] exists at all" (Castle 1993: 2) echoes the attitude of a number of critics, when they refused to assess the lesbian issue in Winterson's text. In this context, Hilary Hinds refers to how "[h]umour ... and a childhood within the context of an Evangelical sect, were seen as being at the heart of *Oranges*" (1992: 155), and she goes on to quote Liz Barker's review of the novel as published in the *Liberator*, where the political significance of Winterson's text is not just taken for granted, but effectively neutralised:

The first [major point of interest] is in watching the power of institution unleashed when a challenge is presented. In this case, it's the author's homosexuality which the church views as the work of a demon ... The second is that ... the writer goes through the process of feeling rejected by the church but manages to leave behind the intolerance and illiberalism of it. (Hinds 1992: 156)

Barker takes as a dominant focus of the novel the process by which "the power of the institution" —she is referring here to the religious institution— is "unleashed" (Hinds 1992: 156), by which, for her, the issue of lesbianism becomes marginalised, de-centralised in relation to the presumed main theme of the novel, which, according to her, is based on a mere religious clash. As Hinds suggests, the mainstream press did not see *Oranges* principally as a lesbian text, but it actively chose to see "Jeanette's lesbianism [...] merely as a suitable foil to her mother's

Evangelicalism, its significance assessed in terms of humour, narrative and ‘character’” (1992: 157). This viewpoint is exemplified by Barker’s review above.

The political implications of perceiving lesbianism “merely as a suitable foil” to Evangelicalism (Hinds 1992: 157) are interesting to assess. When the universal reading of a novel becomes predominant, its sexual politics—obviously lesbian in the present case—are thus transformed into “just another human experience” (Hinds 1992: 157), utterly devoid of the specificity which comes forcibly through in Winterson’s text, for example. A universal reading of *Oranges*, therefore, irremediably fails to consider how Jeanette’s oppression by the Evangelical fanaticism that both mother and church constantly display is all the more potent precisely because of her status as a lesbian subject. In a context where (hetero)sexual intimacy is referred to as an “Unnatural Passion” (ONF *passim*), a specific lesbian sexuality becomes no less than the work of the Devil. One wonders whether Jeanette would have been ‘exorcised’—read ‘abused in the name of God’—by her mother and the elders of her church had she been discovered to be in love with a boy instead of with a girl. Through the universal reading, therefore, the specificity of “[l]esbian oppression [...] remains unacknowledged” (Hinds 1992: 157). In an observation similar to Castle’s and Hinds’s above, critic and writer Adrienne Rich states that when readers and critics neglect to acknowledge a main character’s sexual orientation, they are deliberately and actively misreading, by simplifying the narrative work and depriving it of one of its most fundamental meanings. Indeed, submitting a universal interpretation of an openly lesbian text is an attempt to ‘digest’ lesbian experience altogether by

maintaining that the experience of 'love' is really all the same, under any circumstance (Rich 1977: 58).

In her essay "Subversive Storytelling: The Construction of Girlhood through Fantasy and Fairy Tale in Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*" (1998), Isabel C. Anievas Gamallo follows both Rich's and Hinds's lines of argument and contends that decentering lesbianism has become part of the 'official' reading of the novel, by which the universal reading effectively downplays "[*Oranges's*] resistance to the dominant culture" (1998: 123). Clearly detached from Barker's view, Anievas Gamallo explores how "there is enough evidence in the novel to suggest the importance and *centrality* of lesbianism" (1998: 123, my italics).

Although I wholeheartedly agree with both Hinds and Anievas Gamallo on the centrality of the lesbian issue in *Oranges*, I would go on to argue that the main question informing the novel is the construction of Jeanette's subjectivity, accomplished through her textualisation and subsequent acceptance of a desire which is specifically and openly lesbian. Lesbianism, then, is more than just "a mere accident" in Winterson's construction of subjectivity (Anievas Gamallo 1998: 124), and the text is at pains to make lesbianism central, as every little event that Jeanette chooses to tell the reader aims at aiding her exploration of a lesbian desire which she clearly identifies with, or which is, in other words, a pivotal part of her subjectivity.

Correspondingly, most of the novel concentrates almost exclusively on the creation of Jeanette's lesbian identity. This exploration follows an ascending progress, which is inaugurated by the prediction of a gypsy at a fair, and further

enhanced by Jeanette’s somewhat naive rejection of heterosexuality through her thoughts on marriage and her general resistance to conventional fairy-tale images of passive femininity. The present section of this study will thus focus on the means by which Jeanette textualises and comes to terms with lesbian desire, and I will argue that this process is attained via her construction of a specific, yet alternative, location for desire in the fairy tales that she interweaves with the realist narrative. In these tales, the content of which will be analysed in detail, Jeanette finds not only a site of resistance to Bible teachings and a place of solace to deal with her emotional detachment from her mother, but also a voice to articulate her lesbian desire.

4.1 Apparitional Lesbians

‘They’re looking in the wrong place ... If they want to get at my demon they’ll have to get at me’ —Jeanette, in Jeanette Winterson, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, 106

The critical obliteration of the lesbian issue in *Oranges*, the denial to acknowledge that the lesbian in Jeanette “is there, in plain view, mortal and magnificent, at the center of the screen,” to use Castle’s words (1993: 2), is representative of the trajectory which lesbian desire and lesbian sexuality have been subjected to in the history of the arts and, more specifically, in the history of literature.¹ The representation of lesbian desire and lesbian sexuality has traditionally held a problematic status, and it has frequently been relegated to pornography, with lesbian characters adjusting to the patriarchal *cliché* of either “perverts, inverts, tribades” or “circus freaks and Satan worshippers, girl-catchers and porno turn-ons,” to which Winterson herself refers in her short story “The

Poetics of Sex” (Reynolds 1995: 315). Critic Lillian Faderman echoes these words in her study *Surpassing the Love of Men* (1981), where she examines in detail the changing portrait of lesbians in the history of literature, arguing:

In twentieth-century pornography which deals with lesbian sex, frequently at least one of the females, generally the older woman, who is usually the aggressor, is criticized, either explicitly or implicitly for her lesbianism. Her punishment, in fact, has often supplied the ‘redeeming social value’ of the work. (1991 [1981]: 29-30)

The double standard in these kind of works is made manifest in Faderman’s words above. On the one hand, they function as somewhat stimulating pornographic manifestos meticulously describing lesbian sex for the (male) reader’s arousal, whilst on the other they successfully offer a locale where an uncontaminated patriarchal *status quo* is preserved through the destruction of the threatening lesbian subject, “generally the older woman, who is usually the aggressor” (Faderman 1991 [1981]: 29-30). Thus the reader can enjoy himself safe in the knowledge that society as he knows it is not going to collapse under the mysterious perversion offered by same-sex desire once his reading of the book has finished. Faderman goes on to argue that it is noteworthy to see the difference in treatment of the literary lesbian in the erotic literature of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, where “lesbianism is usually seen to function in an amoral universe” (1991 [1981]: 30). Her own account for this difference lies in the fact that women were taken less seriously as independent human beings and so lesbianism was regarded as far from a threatening activity in previous centuries:

Unlike in our century [twentieth], it was seldom believed in earlier eras that non-procreative sexual behaviour might carry over to autonomous social behavior, unless a woman flamboyantly demonstrated the connection, by transvestism for example. (1991 [1981]: 30)

Lesbian intimacy was not to be feared as it was considered to be detached from the presumed emotional dimensions inherent to any heterosexual relationship. Lesbianism was regarded primarily as a sexual act, and any relation between two women was considered as naturally lacking “admiration” and “tenderness” (Faderman 1991 [1981]: 37). By the eighteenth century, explicit depictions of lesbian sex had the purpose of merely arousing the male reader and, Faderman notes: “since women themselves did not write erotic literature, the most bizarre male depictions of lesbianism went unchallenged” (1991 [1981]: 45). Thus the cliché of the lesbian as “in every case, aggressive and unretiring, not at all like the conventional eighteenth-century ideal of femininity” (Faderman 1991 [1981]: 45) is effectively constructed in these unchallenged eighteenth-century depictions of lesbians. The following century contributed to the construction of the somewhat exotic image of the lesbian, mainly through the “ambivalent attitudes of the French aesthetes (the lesbian was a demon to their bourgeois Catholic side and a rebel and a martyr to their artist’s side)”, by which she “became an image of pure evil in the hands of the nonaesthete writers of the nineteenth century” (Faderman 1991 [1981]: 277). In other words, until the rise of the lesbian-feminist movement in the 1960s, the characterisation of lesbians in literature was confined mainly to two types: “the lesbian as sickie ... and the lesbian as martyr” (Faderman 1991

[1981]: 392). Gliding ambiguously between these two categories is Stephen Gordon, the protagonist of Radclyffe Hall's popular novel *The Well of Loneliness* (1928).²

Hall's text continues to be the most widely read and debated novel of lesbian desire, even though her decision to feature a female 'invert'³ has been a source of heated discussion amongst literary critics and readers alike. Stephen's masculine poise conforms one of the great ambiguities in Hall's text, as it could be offered in the manner of a negative image of lesbians, whilst at the same time equally conforming to a questioning of traditional sexual roles.⁴ Stephen's very name bears the extent of her dilemma, her "male soul trapped in a woman's body," according to Joseph Bristow (1989 [1981]: 19). Far from choosing it herself, she was given a male name by a father who desperately hoped for a son, an indication that, from her birth, something went 'wrong', and a girl appeared in the place where a boy should have been, almost by a foolish mistake of nature. Stephen, therefore, wears her cross-gendered name as a visible sign of the mistake she is, which has repercussions not just in the way others see her, but the way she sees herself, and her relation to her corporeality:

All her life she must drag this body of hers like a monstrous fetter imposed on her spirit. This strangely ardent yet sterile body that must worship yet never be worshipped in return by the creature of its adoration. She longed to maim it, for it made her feel cruel; it was so white, so strong and so self-sufficient; yet withal so poor and unhappy a thing that her eyes filled with tears and her hate turned to pity. She began to grieve over it, touching her breasts with pitiful fingers,

stroking her shoulders, letting her hands slip along her straight thighs

–Oh, poor and most desolate body! (Hall 1981 [1928]: 187)

This extract, which is one of the most provoking in Hall’s text, shows how Stephen’s outer and inner psychic spaces effectively collapse under the burden of corporeality. Her female body is described as “a monstrous fetter imposed on her spirit”, a “strangely ardent yet sterile body” that she longs to “maim”, while feeling those parts which make it physically and obviously female: the “breasts”, the “shoulders”, the “thighs” (Hall 1981 [1928]: 187). Hall offers the idea of an essence of homosexuality inside Stephen —“imposed on her spirit”— and she clearly constructs a character who is forlorn in the recognition that she is “sterile”, not because she cannot conceive, but because she feels unable to find an object of love, even though she is “ardent” to do so (Hall 1981 [1928]: 187). The freakish quality of her female body, however, is brought to the fore and offered as the main explanation for her ‘problem’.⁵

It comes as little surprise to learn that Radclyffe Hall’s research for *The Well of Loneliness* included the works of the most popular ‘authorities’ on sexual inversion, namely Krafft-Ebing and his disciples, Havelock Ellis, Iwan Block and Magnus Hirschfeld (Faderman 1991 [1981]: 317).⁶ According to Krafft-Ebing’s theories, mostly developed in his *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1892), the lesbian had a masculine essence, but she was trapped in the wrong body, a notion which casts further light on Stephen’s words above and her general predicament throughout Hall’s text. Even though by the time *The Well of Loneliness* was published, Krafft-Ebing’s theories were no longer accepted in the medical world, Hall clearly contributed to their re-popularisation, in an attempt to provide lesbians with a

pseudo-moral defence for their desire, in dealing with social hostility. In Hall's view, if a lesbian had an homosexual 'essence', if she was born with her 'condition', she could always contend that God had actually created her that way. Even though Hall provided this explanation in genuine positive earnest, the responses to her novel from the lesbian readership were far from positive. An instance is the letter Violet Trefusis wrote to her lover, Vita Sackville-West, where she described the book as a "loathsome example" (Faderman 1991 [1981]: 322). This would not be so unfortunate were it not for the fact that, for decades, Stephen Gordon was popularised as the only literary image of lesbianism, both for lesbians and heterosexuals, for which it had, according to Faderman, "a devastating effect" (1991 [1981]: 323) in so far as Hall offered a picture of the lesbian as a freak, an individual born in the wrong body, a foolish error of nature.

Most of the fiction featuring lesbians written over the twentieth century tends to follow Hall's view and uphold this freakish component of lesbianism. In the first half of the twentieth century, Faderman states, "the lesbian is a feminist, a woman with a powerful ego [...]. Almost invariably, she is 'twisted'" (1991 [1981]: 341). When authors needed to find a physical metaphor for the lesbian's 'twistedness', for their perversity, they would turn her into a blood-sucker, a vampire. This is the case of Clemence Dane's *Regiment of Women* (1915), a lesbian vampire novel set in a girls' school,⁷ Francis Brett Young's *White Ladies* (1935), and Dorothy Barker's *Trio* (1943). Although not vampiric in contents, D. H. Lawrence's *The Fox* (serialised in the magazine *Dial* in 1922) also attempts to offer a presumed medical study of the perversity of lesbians.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, a bounty of lesbian stories were published in cheap paperback. These offered the already familiar images of lesbians, mainly dichotomised into two basic ones: “sadistic evil lesbians who spouted feminist philosophy and corrupted innocents”, or “confused and sick lesbians torturing themselves and being tortured by others” (Faderman 1991 [1981]: 355). It was not until the advent of the lesbian-feminist movement, together with the establishment of such lesbian-feminist publishing houses as Daughters, Inc., Naiad Press, and Diana Press, that lesbians were to find a space to write about the complexity of their experience, thus changing the negative literary image of lesbians promoted by previous works. Around the time of publication of Rita Mae Brown’s *Rubyfruit Jungle*, referred to in the previous section of this study, Sharon Isabell’s *Yesterday’s Lessons* (1974), and June Arnold’s *The Cook and the Carpenter* (1973) were also available, among others. These texts share their authors’ attempt to depict how the perversity that lesbians displayed in previous decades is more deeply related to their heterosexist societies’ inability to accept difference than to their actual sexual choices.

This is also the dominating atmosphere of *Oranges*, with Jeanette’s point of view given prominence against a hostile environment. As argued above, the discovery of a lesbian identity clearly informs Winterson’s literary project, which transforms *Oranges* into a subversive version of a *Bildungsroman* or, rather, a *Bildungsroman* displaced “from the center to the margins of the literary and cultural discourses” (Anievas Gamallo 1998: 123). Certainly, as Isabel C. Anievas Gamallo demonstrates, the motifs of the Coming-Out *Bildungsroman* are present in the narrative structure of *Oranges* in so far as the reader is presented with an

intelligent protagonist who feels trapped by the narrowness of her provincial surroundings, who later discovers her lesbian orientation through a first love affair, and who is punished by her community (Anievas Gamallo 1998: 123).⁸

A key element of the *Bildungsroman* mode likewise is that provided by the relationship established between mother and daughter, which echoes the equally crucial relationship that heroes in male *Bildungsromane* establish with their fathers.⁹ Jeanette's process of development involves growing against an overpowering mother figure, who personifies, according to Susana Onega, the values of patriarchal humanism *à la* Margaret Thatcher (1995b: 110). In Jeanette's case, undermining the authority of the mother is all the more effective, since the older woman likewise embodies the kind of religious obsessive intolerance which Jeanette needs to leave behind in order to accept the individual she has become and discover that her own worldview, even when it is dissociated from the church's instructions, can also be valid.

4.2 Maternal Authority

"A woman *is* her mother
That's the main thing"
—Anne Sexton, "Housewife", ll. 33-34

My father liked to watch the wrestling, my mother liked to wrestle; it didn't matter what. She was in the white corner, and that was that.

She hung out the largest sheets on windiest days. She *wanted* the Mormons to knock on the door. At election time in a Labour mill town she put the picture of the Conservative candidate in the window.

She had never heard of mixed feelings. There were friends and there were enemies.

Enemies were: The Devil (in his many forms)

Next Door

Sex (in its many forms)

Slugs

Friends were: God

Our dog

Auntie Madge

The Novels of Charlotte Brontë

Slug pellets. (ONF 1, italics in original)

From the very first page of *Oranges*, the reader is provided with a clear-cut view of Jeanette’s mother’s apparently unambiguous personality as a woman who “liked to wrestle” and “had never heard of mixed feelings” (ONF 1). An overwhelming presence within the domestic environment and amongst the religious community, Louie —this is the mother’s name— apparently effortlessly nullifies the personality of those around her by bossing them around. A case in point is her husband’s, described by Jeanette as an “easy-going” man who:

would have cooked [breakfast] himself but for my mother’s complete conviction that she was the only person in our house who could tell a saucepan from a piano. She was wrong, as far as we were concerned, but right as far as she was concerned, and really, that’s what mattered. (ONF 5)

Mother's power, therefore, is omnipotent and all-pervading, and it effectively invalidates any kind of activity around her if it is not monitored by herself. Elsewhere, Jeanette pities her father, as he "was never quite good enough" (ONF 5), always coming short in constant, unwanted competition with other male characters who rated higher in the mother's esteem, such as the Pastor or even Jesus. The mother's deeply-rooted defence of patriarchal authority within the religious community does not seem to extend to the domestic sphere or, the point is hinted at, it is only men with power that she admires. Although Jeanette's father is described mostly as passive and easy-going, he cannot but have his little share of rebellion against his wife's authority—for instance, by watching the wrestling on a Sunday, the so-called "Day of the Lord" (ONF 6). Still, these little, almost childish rebellions against (maternal) authority on the side of the father are not enough to grant him a position of respect in her eyes. The obvious result is, therefore, that he is never "quite good enough" (ONF 5).

Mother becomes the centre of Jeanette's universe to the point that her education is related to the interests and obsessions of the older woman. Thus, learning to read means becoming familiar with the Book of Deuteronomy and the lives of saints, gaining knowledge of seed categories (ONF 16), and reading the magazine *The Plain Truth*, which the mother receives on a weekly basis (ONF 17). Jeanette's early childhood, confined as it is within the physical walls of the house and the emotional walls of her mother and the religious community, is thoroughly permeated by the precepts of Evangelism. Almost like an inmate in an invisible prison, Jeanette does not have any access to information other than that provided by her mother's views, for she is educated at home, and school is

described as a “Breeding Ground” which will “lead [her] astray” (ONF 16). The all-pervasiveness of the mother’s dogmatic views and confrontational attitude have a huge and terrible impact on the way in which Jeanette experiences the world around her. Like Pip, in Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations*, Jeanette is a child in a world of adults, yet another source for her feeling of estrangement from her surroundings.

For Susana Onega, as referred to above, Jeanette’s mother is “una figura represora que encarna los valores centralistas y totalizantes del humanismo patriarcal” (1995b: 110). In this respect, she may be compared to Margaret Thatcher in her role as Prime Minister for, “[a]s dogmatic and powerful middle-aged women, they both invite the same mix of admiration, incredulity, disapproval and passionate hatred” (Marshment & Hallam 1994: 157). Mother’s exercise of totalitarian control and repression is felt even when she is out of the picture. Her emotional panopticon is solidly built around Jeanette, possibly because the mother personifies and understands power in a surprisingly Foucauldian way, that is, as the force which “reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives” (Foucault 1980: 39). Hence, once the seed of repression has been planted, the agent does not really need to be around in order to effect the coveted repression on the individual, for it ‘naturally’ dominates her actions, her attitudes, her discourses; in short, her everyday life.

The fact that Mother is an influential member of the Evangelical sect merely reaffirms her tendency towards surveillance. Louie uses religion as a

release for her bigoted attitude towards life in general, by which the church becomes the perfect scenario where her relentless authority, her thirst for power and her overbearing ambition can be inscribed. The sect, as a self-contained institution, founds its own code of rules, its controlling discourses, and its own methods of discipline and punishment. As an autonomous organisation, which keeps its doors locked from mainstream society at large, the Evangelical group has absolute power to exert power, thus becoming an isolated dictatorship where abuse —mostly psychological, at times physical— is not only possible, but is strongly recommended under certain circumstances. Therefore, the religious community is an ideal locus for the operation of the relation between power and the individual as described by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), where the subject becomes an object upon which certain structures of power intervene by means of a repressive discourse. In the present case, the repressive discourse at work is of a Christian fundamentalist nature.

Throughout the novel, the mother is described as unaffectionate towards Jeanette, an attitude which is clearly contrasted to that of other female characters, who make up for the lack of affection through the display of a motherly behaviour towards the child. The clearest instance of this would be Elsie Norris, of whom more later. Although the mother's attitude to Jeanette is always described as lacking in affection and tenderness, there is a clear indication that she must have been a passionate woman in the past; after all, the narrative is at constant pains to suggest that her choice for a working-class husband who was also a gambler provoked a consequential rift with her middle-class family. The story of the

mother’s conversion, likewise, is clearly related to her physical, most unholy, attraction for Pastor Spratt:

One night, by mistake, she had walked into Pastor Spratt’s Glory Crusade. It was in a tent on some spare land, and every evening Pastor Spratt spoke of the fate of the damned, and performed healing miracles. He was very impressive. My mother said he looked like Errol Flynn, but holy. A lot of women found the Lord that week.

(ONF 8)

The child narrator, aided here by an adult focaliser, actively provides the impression that the mother’s interest in Evangelism, just like that of “a lot of women” (ONF 8), was related to Pastor Spratt’s physical appeal, to the fact that he “looked like Errol Flynn, but holy” (ONF 8), not to her presumed spiritual yearning. Indications throughout the novel, and more specifically over Jeanette’s adolescence, point to the fact that the mother had a past of sensuality that she wishes to silence, and thus her religious fanaticism is represented as a means of sublimating the ‘Unnatural Passions’ she felt at a younger age. In this context, Jeanette repeatedly mentions her mother’s ability to speak French and to play the piano, which suggests that she had a middle-class upbringing. When invited by Jeanette to teach her French, the mother refuses, arguing: “it was nearly my downfall” (ONF 16). Later on, Louie offers the story of her affair with the Frenchman Pierre as a correctional tale for Jeanette, who is, incidentally, starting to discover lesbian intimacy. Although Jeanette talks about her partner Melanie very often, her mother prefers to think that the girl is in love with a new convert

boy called Graham, and so she decides to offer to her daughter the cautionary tale of her past relationship with Pierre.

As the story goes, mother and Pierre met in Paris, and mother felt a sensation that she had never experienced before: “a fizzing and buzzing and a certain giddiness. Not only with Pierre, but anywhere, at any time” (ONF 85). Pierre, who, presumably also felt the “fizzing and buzzing” sensation, asked Louie to marry him but, instead of accepting his proposal, she decided to see a doctor, worried as she was that her love for the Frenchman must be giving her this distressing disposition. Upon her visit to the doctor, the reality principle established itself, and passion was put to a sudden end via the medical diagnosis of a most unromantic stomach ulcer. From that moment on, she avoided Pierre and his marriage proposals to the point that she fled the country. She finishes her story on a threatening note aimed at Jeanette’s presumed feelings for Graham, but more in tune with the girl’s night visits to Melanie: “[s]o just you take care, what you think is the heart might well be another organ” (ONF 85). Here, the association between power and repression is particularly felt in so far as the mother’s coercive discourse is openly related to sexuality. In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1976), Michel Foucault explains how it is precisely the prohibition—the use of a repressive discourse about sexuality—which originates an undercurrent of subversion. After, all, according to Foucault:

Sexuality must not be described as a stubborn drive, by nature alien and of necessity disobedient to a power which exhausts itself trying to subdue it and often fails to control it entirely. It appears rather as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power: between men

and women, young people and old people, parents and offspring, teachers and students, priests and laity, an administration and a population. (1990 [1976]: 103)

Indeed, sexuality is not outside power, “alien”, in Foucault’s words, but it is, precisely “an especially dense transfer point for relations of power” (1990 [1976]: 103). Foucault’s view casts an interesting light on Winterson’s text, in so far as it is specifically during Jeanette’s first contacts with sexuality at large, that the mother’s repression via the use of an admonishing discourse is felt to have a particular impetus, as the passage which describes her frustrated love-affair with Pierre demonstrates.

Thus, during Jeanette’s adolescence her relationship with her mother intensifies and reaches its climax. It is also during this period that she begins to secretly challenge some of her mother’s views, an idea which is particularly put forward when Jeanette discovers the ‘truth’ about mother’s favourite book, *Jane Eyre*. It is no surprise that this discovery comes at about the same time that Jeanette starts feeling depressed over heterosexual marriage, for she cannot find any appeal in the stories of wife-battering that she overhears amongst her mother’s friends and the neighbours. Louie, however, tells Jeanette that she should not worry about marriage, as she is “dedicated to the Lord” (ONF 72) and her name was put down for missionary school as soon as she was adopted: “Remember Jane Eyre and St John Rivers’,” she offers as words of solace to the young girl (ONF 72). Jeanette, far from finding comfort in the story the older woman requests that she remember, cannot help but acknowledge that it merely

confirms her mother's sham means of comfort, the lie upon which her whole life is based:

what my mother didn't know was that I now knew she had rewritten the ending [of *Jane Eyre*]. *Jane Eyre* was her favourite non-Bible book, and she read it to me over and over again, when I was very small. I couldn't read it, but I knew where the pages turned. Later, literate and curious, I had decided to read it for myself. A sort of nostalgic pilgrimage. I found out, that dreadful day in a back corner of the library, that Jane doesn't marry St John at all, that she goes back to Mr Rochester. It was like the day I discovered my adoption papers while searching for a pack of cards. I have never since played cards, and I have never since read *Jane Eyre*. (ONF 73)

This is one of the first pieces of evidence that the delicate thread uniting mother and daughter will soon break, as the mother is guilty of lying to Jeanette in order to pursue her personal ambitions about her daughter's future. The effect that the discovery has on the child is devastating; it happens on a "dreadful day" (ONF 73), and it is put on a par with such infamous news as her discovery that she was adopted, a piece of information that her mother also kept secret. It is equally interesting to note not only how the discovery is recalled precisely at the time in which Jeanette starts having trouble identifying with heterosexuality, due to her doubts about the married state, but also how from an early age, Jeanette is able to effect a literary sublimation of her own life story. Indeed, the discovery that Jane does not marry St John but goes back to Mr Rochester is as devastating to her as finding her own adoption papers in a drawer. Again, the feeble boundary which

separates ‘reality’ and ‘fiction’ is seen to collapse. The reference to *Jane Eyre*, on the other hand, is not chosen lightly. According to Karen Rowe, Charlotte Brontë’s text has deep connections with fairy tales, as it:

begins with an echo of *Cinderella* and then transforms into a variant of *Beauty and the Beast*, one modified however by Gothic shadows and psychological depths permitted to nineteenth-century novelists. From its opening *Jane Eyre* plays upon a collective, folkloric unconscious, engaging readers to transfer youthful romantic expectations from their own psyches into the fiction and to judge its success by the fidelity to fantasy paradigms. (1983: 89)

Tess Cosslet (1998: 24) also finds the dialogic relation between *Oranges* and *Jane Eyre* of some significance. For a start, there are obvious similarities in the two novels as far as the plot line is concerned —Jane, in Charlotte Brontë’s novel, embarks, like Jeanette, on a story which will allow her to construct and explore her subjectivity. More interestingly, however, the way in which Brontë’s text is dealt with in Winterson’s novel brings into focus the extent to which Jeanette’s mother will manipulate the elements around her in order to make them harmonise with her particular worldview. Last but not least, it provides a new, interesting perspective on the mother’s personality: her tendency to revise stories which have already been written. This is of the utmost importance in so far as the reader understands that, to a certain extent, Jeanette inherits this revisionary tendency from the older woman, in a technique which will prove, paradoxically, the pivotal point of her resistance both to her mother and to her imposing worldview.

Jeanette, however, is incapable of relating either to the original plot of *Jane Eyre* or to the variation that her mother has constructed. Both are equally sterile in offering any consolation to the negative thoughts on heterosexual marriage that she is now beginning to have, and which worry her so. Rowe, above, offers a reading of Brontë's novel which clearly connects the nineteenth-century text to a fairy tale which has some relevance in Jeanette's understanding of marriage: "Beauty and the Beast".

Jeanette's doubts and general confusion begin precisely when she starts reading "Beauty and the Beast" in the library. Far from taking the story lightheartedly, her vigorous imagination soon connects it to a recurrent dream of marriage that she has, and in which she is forced to marry a pig. In turn, the dream is connected to a passing comment one of her neighbours makes: "[t]here was a woman in our street who told us all she had married a pig. I asked her why she did it, and she said 'You never know until it's too late'" (ONF 69). Far from offering an alternative to marrying pigs, the fairy tale she reads in the library rather confirms Jeanette's fears:

Slowly I closed the book. It was clear that I had stumbled on a terrible conspiracy.

There are women in the world.

There are men in the world.

And there are beasts.

What do you do if you marry a beast?

Kissing them didn't always help.

And beasts are crafty. They disguise themselves like you and I.

Like the wolf in ‘Little Red Riding Hood’.

[...] There were a lot of women, and most of them got married. If they couldn’t marry each other, and I didn’t think they could, because of having babies, some of them would inevitably have to marry beasts.

(ONF 71)

On the one hand, here is an ironic note on what happens when one takes the meaning of words literally. On the other hand, however, the narrative shows how, for Jeanette, literature seems to encapsulate ‘truth’: there is no escape from Beauty-and-the-Beast dynamics and, worse, the beast does not always, conveniently, turn into a prince. The Beauty-and-the-Beast motif reaches out to ‘infect’ even the story mother offered as a solace to Jeanette’s doubts, *Jane Eyre*, and which contains an ending which is completely different from the holy *dénouement* in mother’s rewriting of it: after all, the Beauty (Jane) ends up marrying a most ‘beastly’ Mr Rochester. Hence, Mother’s alternative proves false, which brings Jeanette to a dead-end that allows her to discover the older woman’s weakness in so far as she had been lying not only to the child, but to herself. Hence, the discovery of the ending that Brontë chose for her narrative, in contrast to the one the mother constructs for her own revision, becomes a powerful symbol of the mother’s betrayal.

The mother’s unaffectionate behaviour towards Jeanette and her use of correctional tales is deeply contrasted to the relationship that the child establishes with Elsie Norris. “Testifying Elsie” (ONF 23) is an effective mother surrogate for Jeanette and a foil to Jeanette’s mother in so far as she is described as a

somewhat eccentric character for whom religion is the most pragmatic of experiences:

Whenever the pastor asked for a testimony on God's goodness, Elsie leapt to her feet and cried, 'Listen to what the Lord has done for me this week.'

She needed eggs, the Lord had sent them.

She had a bout of colic, the Lord took it away. (ONF 23)

This logical, and ultimately comic view, on the Lord's actions, together with her interest in art, literature and music, and the fact that the elder woman is always there when Jeanette needs her, transform Elsie into one of the great influences of the girl's formative years, the other being her mother. Elsie and the mother, therefore, stand as two opposing forces during Jeanette's childhood and early adolescence, by which a sense of balance is established in Jeanette's psychic scenario, specifically through the introduction of this older friend.¹⁰

Through her friendship with Elsie, Jeanette is introduced to interesting alternatives to the mother's all-pervasive view of the world, mainly through the knowledge that there are other texts apart from the Bible:

When Elsie wasn't reading the Bible, or telling stories, she spent time with the poets. She told me all about Swinburne and his troubles, and about the oppression of William Blake. 'No one listens to eccentrics,' she said. When I was sad she read me *Goblin Market* by a woman called Christina Rossetti, whose friend once gave her a pickled mouse in a jar, for a present. But of all her loves, Elsie's favourite was W.B. Yeats. Yeats, she said, knew the importance of numbers, and the great

effect of the imagination on the world. ‘What looks like one thing,’ she told me, ‘may well be another’ (ONF 29-30)

Elsie teaches Jeanette not only about Swinburne and Blake, but also about the importance of stories, of the need for a multiplicity of interpretations, and of the immense value of imagination in the world. In other words, Elsie teaches Jeanette the strategies for survival that she will put to use later on in the narrative, and which will engage in a more tolerant view of the world than the one her mother displays. After all, and as Elsie wisely suggests, “[w]hat looks like one thing ... may well be another” (ONF 30).

The relationship between Jeanette and her mother is finally broken by the latter’s attitude during Jeanette’s first love affair with a woman. As expected, due to her religious fanaticism, the mother is far from understanding when Jeanette’s relationship with another girl in the religious community is discovered, and she plays a fundamental role during Jeanette’s exorcism, carried out by the elders under the supervision of Pastor Spratt: “My mother nodded, nodded, nodded, and locked me in. She didn’t give me a blanket, but she took away the light bulb” (ONF 105). Later on, when Jeanette gets glandular fever and has to be away in hospital for a few days, the mother takes advantage of her departure in order to raid her room and burn any evidence that the relationship with Melanie ever took place:

While I lay shivering in the parlour she took a toothcomb to my room and found all the letters, all the cards, all the jottings of my own, and burnt them one night in the backyard. 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 queen, but not my queen any more, not the White Queen any more.(ONF 110)

Mother's behaviour proves emotionally devastating for both women, as the adult focaliser seems to be well aware: "she was still queen, but not my queen any more, not the White Queen any more" (ONF 110). What the mother is doing here is to erase Jeanette's story, to mutilate her past and, hence, a fundamental part of her life. Thus, she becomes a figure in complete antagonism to that of the nurturing mother, the provider of life. Somehow, she is a mother contra-nature, for she is destructive as opposed to creative and, indeed, through her actions, she burns a lot more than the letters, she effectively annihilates her relationship with her daughter.

Mother's very personal act of exorcism through the burning of Jeanette's past in the backyard, prevents her from being her daughter's queen anymore, and hence she becomes identified, at the beginning of the next chapter, "Judges", with the cruel Queen of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), yet another example of how literature becomes a successful means of sublimating Jeanette's painful experiences. Even though she has nowhere to go, mother asks Jeanette to move out of the house, claiming that "the Devil looks after his own" (ONF 134), another expression of her severe behaviour, which prompts Jeanette to take discursive revenge. These are her thoughts, when left on her own: "If there's such a thing as spiritual adultery, my mother was a whore" (ONF 132). Power is a relation, "a dynamic of control and lack of control", as Chris Weedon puts it (1994 [1987]:

112). The existence of power relations depends primarily on a multiplicity of points of resistance, hence Foucault’s words:

Power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general matrix —no such duality extending from the top down and reacting on more and more limited groups to the very depths of the social body. (1990 [1976]: 94)

There does not exist, according to Foucault, a simple, unproblematised, binary relation of power and powerlessness, but there are shifting positions for ruler and ruled. Every little subversion of her mother’s set of rules provides Jeanette with a new (temporary) position. The words of resistance quoted above, where Jeanette describes her mother as “a [spiritual] whore” (ONF 132), allow her to shed the last remnants of a subject position which is imposed from outside, by the older woman.

The last reunion with mother is told and focalised by an adult narrator, who is now able to portray the hypocritical nature of the older woman and her inability to make any kind of progress through her ironic perspective. The blessing the mother offers for Christmas time, for example, is thoughtless and artificial, due to the fact that she is in a rush to open her presents, and even though the chapter ends on a potential image of a perfect family environment, with chairs around a table and “the right number of cups” (ONF 171), Jeanette’s mother is still presented as a domineering and obsessive woman, who continues her war against the demon of homosexuality —the description in the self-help kit which

she has devised is more than sardonic— and is therefore unable to understand difference, let alone accept it:

She'd begun a self-help kit for the spiritually disturbed. What not to do, who to contact, which passages of the Bible to read. And of course, the choir like to make tapes, to sing the demon away. Most were Pastor Finch's own compositions. I was glad she had a hobby, but not pleased that my particular sins were listed in the self-help kit. Still, at least she hadn't stuck in a passport photograph, warning the North-West to lock up their daughters. (ONF 169)

The relation of power between Jeanette and her mother is central to the story that the narrator wishes to tell. This centrality comes forcibly through in Winterson's choice for the title of the novel, in itself a subversion of mother's favourite motto, "oranges are the only fruit":

My mother came to see me [in hospital] quite a lot in the end, but it was the busy season at church. They were planning the Christmas campaign. When she couldn't come herself she sent my father, usually with a letter and a couple of oranges.

'The only fruit,' she always said.

Fruit salad, fruit pie, fruit for fools, fruited punch. Demon fruit, passion fruit, rotten fruit, fruit on Sunday.

Oranges are the only fruit. (ONF 29)

This somewhat enigmatic aphorism has an obvious explanation within mother's framework of the world. Considering that the apple was the fruit which induced Adam and Eve to sin, she decides to obliterate the existence of apples—to censor

them, as it were— and transform oranges into the only fruit. Whenever Jeanette needs to be comforted or rewarded, she is given an orange, due to the innocuous status mother has bestowed on this particular fruit. Mother’s slogan is a powerful way to present how her mind works, how she is able to find the answer to all interrogations in just one assertive and unquestioned statement: “[*t*]he *only* fruit” (ONF 29, my italics) The use of the determinate article, reinforced by “only”, establishes that there is no alternative to this particular fruit in the same way that there are no alternatives to Louie’s view of the world. The motto is, according to Anievas Gamallo, a metaphor for the mother’s “severe single-mindedness and her limited, rigid, and absolutist worldview. Her mother has taught her that there is only one right ‘reading’ and interpretation of the world, but Jeanette’s answer is to contest it by writing and rewriting as many as she can” (1998: 121). For Jeanette, not only are oranges not the only fruit, but, with a little imagination, oranges can offer a multiplicity of combinations which subtly subvert the rigid structure upon which (maternal) control is erected: “Fruit salad, fruit pie, fruit for fools, fruited punch. Demon fruit, passion fruit, rotten fruit, fruit on Sunday” (ONF 29). By transforming the oranges that mother provides into Foucauldian “points of resistance” (1990 [1976]: 94) through the power of imagination, Jeanette is able to attempt the sketch of an alternative universe, one where her desire can be articulated and, thus, where her subjectivity can effectively be located and explored. This is how Foucault would explain it:

[The points of resistance] play the role of adversary, target, support or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. [...] There is a plurality of

resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations. But this does not mean that they are only a reaction or rebound, forming with respect to the basic domination an underside that is in the end always passive, doomed to perpetual defeat. (1990 [1976]: 96).

Jeanette's basic point of resistance to maternal power —“possible”, “necessary”, but also “spontaneous” and “solitary” (Foucault 1990 [1976]: 96)— starts with her ability to bestow a completely new and personal meaning on the metaphorical oranges, one which is devoid of the repression and prohibition which they represent within the mother's code whilst, at one and the same time, being intimately related to it. The hallucinatory orange demon which she can see inside the fruit and which will later speak to her about desire is a direct subversion of mother's “limited, rigid, and absolutist worldview”, in Gamallo's words (1998: 121):

I started to feel ill again, so I took off my socks and pushed my toes into my mouth for comfort. They tasted of digestive biscuits. After that I went to the window and burst a few of the geranium buds to hear the pop. When I sat down the demon was glowing very bright and polishing the crocodile with its handkerchief.

‘What sex are you?’

‘Doesn't matter does it? After all that's your problem.’

‘If I keep you, what will happen?’

‘You’ll have a difficult, different time.’

‘Is it worth it?’

‘That’s up to you’. (ONF 107)

Jeanette’s fabrication of an alternative, magical universe through her fairy tales allows her to construct an alternative location where her subjectivity can be built beyond the inflexible, authoritarian power structure that the mother and her rigid universe want to impose on her. This is a power structure which Jeanette needs to transcend in order to become a subject. In other words, the maternal narrative of authority needs to be subverted, not in order to be substituted by a new power structure, but so as to offer an optional path far from repression, a path to the construction of Jeanette’s subjectivity. Hence, the novel denies presenting a counter-attack to the maternal beliefs, focusing, rather, on how destructive they are, and how important it is for Jeanette to overcome them, painful as the psychological confrontation and physical separation from her mother might be. According to Chris Weedon, “[w]here there is a space between the position of subject offered by a discourse and individual interest, a resistance to that subject position is produced” (1994 [1987]: 112-113). Jeanette’s resistance to the subject position which Mother’s discourse offers is effected through the construction of the alternative “space” (Weedon 1994 [1987]: 112) of her fairy tales, the contents of which will be discussed in the next section of this study.

4.3 Perverse Fantasies

“Only the perverse fantasy can still save us” —Goethe to Eckerman, unacknowledged

Were it not for the fantastic narratives which are delicately and subtly interwoven with the ‘facts’ in Jeanette’s life, *Oranges* could easily be described as a realistic novel. The fairy stories and (per)versions of biblical myths and Arthurian legends which Jeanette invents and tells the reader obliquely to her life story, are initially devised to complement the realistic narrative in order to comprehend Jeanette’s feelings and sympathise with them. Little by little, however, ‘fantasy’ overtakes ‘reality’ to the point that a complete blurring between the two is effected. Evidence of this is found in that some of the information in Jeanette’s life is exclusively told through the fairy-tale sections. A case in point would be Jeanette’s leaving home, which the realistic section refuses to discuss, and is told through the allegory of Sir Perceval and his departure in search of the Holy Grail. Hence, the novel would not be fully understood if the fairy-tale sections were omitted, as these function as much more than mere complements, and thus pertinently acquire a central position within it. These ‘deviations’ from the realist narrative offer both the reader and Jeanette herself a map of her inner feelings and her fears, whilst becoming a means of finding solutions to her circumstances. In this way, both the contents, the form and the main purpose of these narratives position them as subversive for, on the one hand, they are, as aforementioned, (per)versions of a genre form which already exists, and on the other, they constitute an impeccable location from which to discuss any information which would be difficult to assess at a rational level. It is my

argument, therefore, that through these fantastic digressions the reader is able to have access to the part of Jeanette which is beyond her rational dimension, thus becoming the site for the irrational, in other words, the perfect location for the articulation of desire.

The choice of the fairy tale as a format to express feelings, fears and desires which subvert and, sometimes, destabilise the rational is accurate, for the fairy tale *per se* can be regarded as a subversive genre. Looking back in time in order to find the origins of these tales, one learns that they started out as the narrative art of ordinary people, an art which would not be appropriated by the aristocracy until the seventeenth century (Duncker 1984: 234). The legitimate owners of the fairy tales were all the members of the community, as can be discerned in the original locution for these tales, the German word *Volksmärchen*, where *Volk* refers to the people.

With the aristocratic appropriation of fairy tales in the seventeenth century, an interesting change was effected as to the essential purpose of the tales themselves. Up until then, they functioned primarily as entertainment for adults, whereas with the beginnings of a notion of education for children during the Renaissance—a notion which did not really exist over the Middle Ages—and, later on, with Protestantism, fairy tales came to be seen as vessels of the ‘right’ education for children (Duncker 1984: 235). Still, one does not need to examine these tales deeply to realise that the messages they put forward are obviously related to the basic desires of common people. The injustice of the feudal system is commonly felt, and the desire to change the situation of those in a disadvantaged position manifests itself. Where else, one wonders, can a frog

become a prince? It must be in an extremely democratic —yet magical, non-realistic— world.

According to Bruno Bettelheim, fairy tales are tales of *Bildung*, the German word for ‘growth and development’ (1991 [1975]: 5). In his extensive and influential study *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, which was first published in 1975, Bettelheim argues that fairy tales allow children to “[gain] a secure understanding of what the meaning of one’s life may or ought to be,” which, for him, “is what constitutes having attained psychological maturity” (1991 [1975]: 3). Therefore, within Bettelheim’s analysis, fairy tales become a good method to understand life and make some progress, some growth, out of this understanding, precisely because they rely on archetypes in order to present their readers with ‘essential’ problems and the potential solution to them. According to Bettelheim, “more can be learned from [fairy tales] about the inner problems of human beings, and of the right solutions to their predicaments in any society” (1991 [1975]: 5). The “inner problems” (1991 [1975]: 5) he refers to are related, it might be assumed, to the workings of the *id*, so to speak, to the confrontation with psychological material which may, at a certain point, work back to the child’s ego surface and pose a dilemma which the fairy tale helps to solve “not through abstract ethical concepts but through that which seems tangibly right and therefore meaningful to him [sic]” (Bettelheim 1991 [1975]: 5). In more Lacanian terms, fairy tales are structured according to the language of the unconscious, hence it is to the unconscious that they send messages, which the conscious mind does not necessarily de-codify, although it is obviously affected by these as well.

Starting off from Bettelheim’s perspective, later critics have analysed and denounced the tendency that fairy tales have towards a binary disposition which is discriminating in terms of gender. This is part of the main aim of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s classic study *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), where the two writers accurately demonstrate how classic tales “state ... culture’s sentences with greater accuracy than more sophisticated literary texts” (1984 [1979]: 36) by reducing processes of socialisation to essential paradigms. It is precise to say that in most fairy tales, possibly in the most popularised, girls are described as passive, docile, even self-sacrificing, waiting at home weaving or looking at themselves in mirrors, while boys go out to fight dragons and eagerly get themselves in all sorts of trouble. This is also the line of argument which Andrea Dworkin embraces in *Woman Hating* (1974), where she states that “we have not formed that ancient world [of fairy tales] —it has formed us” (1974: 32-33); in other words, that by “ingesting” (Dworkin 1974: 33) fairy tales as children, adults grow to become the gender-marked subjects which they are supposed to be within society. Dworkin’s view is pessimistic, which is clear in her words: “[d]espite ourselves, sometimes knowing, unwilling, unable to do otherwise, we act out the roles we were taught” (1974: 33). Although accurate in its foundation, the problem with Dworkin’s assessment of fairy tales is that it assumes that all fairy tales contain a similar, unproblematic message, and that all are automatically received in fixed ways by all readers, which may or may not be the case.¹¹

With this patriarchal panorama in mind, the twentieth century witnessed a great number of rewritings of fairy tales, mostly from a feminist perspective. The poem by Olga Broumas which opens the present section of this study is a case in

point, for it constitutes an interesting, poetic rewriting of the popular fairy tale “Little Red Riding Hood”. Other writers who have turned their interests to the manipulation of this narrative form are Anne Sexton, Tanith Lee, Angela Carter, and Margaret Atwood.¹² This is a phenomenon which is not, however, specific to the twentieth century. Such writers as Isabelle Anne Ritchie, Maria Craik, Mrs Molesworth, Mary de Morgan, and Evelyn Sharp, all of them writing at the end of the nineteenth century, did something similar to what Winterson is doing in *Oranges*, as they either incorporated fairy tales in their works or wrote their own from a new perspective.

Winterson is doing more than re-utilising fairy tales already in circulation, she is offering completely new tales, thus modelling the form to satisfy Jeanette’s interests in her investigations of herself. The reason for this might be simple. As the narrator herself states throughout the novel, her access to literature was for the most part restricted, controlled by her mother’s personal fascination and point of view. The texts at hand, before Elsie Norris’s wise intervention, were the Book of Deuteronomy, mother’s moralising (per)version of *Jane Eyre*, and the fairy tale “Beauty and the Beast”, which is the origin for Jeanette’s doubts about marriage and her ironic comments on it, cleverly filtered through the adult focaliser. Truly, the discovery that life might not be a fairy tale after all, and Jane Eyre does go back to Mr Rochester instead of marrying St John Rivers, might be somewhat devastating, but on the other hand, it also opens fresh possibilities, especially when the reader happens to be a child with a powerful imagination. The lesson to be learnt is that stories can be changed, and that new stories appear after one inflicts a certain degree of perversion to already existing stories. It all depends on

the point of view and the manipulative skills of the narrator, and the new story she *needs* to create, of course. After all, literature can be transformative, if one is brave enough to believe in it.

Following the Foucauldian theorisation that “[t]here is by definition no power without the possibility of resistance” (in Belsey 2002: 54), Jeanette sets out to build her insubordination to the destructive power her mother and the church exert on her, to literally deny the subject position they are trying to impose on her, to counteract their stories —biblical and others— with subversive tales of her own making. The first one appears in “Genesis”, it could not be otherwise.

“Once upon a time there was a brilliant and beautiful princess” (ONF 9), the beginning reads. After the initial shock of having a realistic narrative interrupted by the appearance of the fairy-tale mode, the reader soon realises that this particular fairy tale will cast light upon Jeanette’s adoption, understanding that the reason for it was not related to her mother’s yearning for a baby, but rather to the need to find, like the witch in the tale, someone who would continue her task as “advisor and friend” of the villagers (ONF 9). Hence Jeanette’s mother’s alter ego in the tale decides to “get a child, train it, build it, dedicate it to the Lord” (ONF 10), and on one particular day “[h]er flesh now, sprung from her head” (ONF 10), in a clear allusion to the birth of the virgin goddess of war in Greek mythology, Athena, who emerged from Zeus’s head as an adult woman. Through the textualisation of her own adoption, Jeanette is able not just to inform the reader about this particular event in her life, but also to comprehend the mother’s motives behind her actions. Far from satisfying her maternal feelings, the mother adopts Jeanette in order to fulfil her own expectations as spiritual guru.

The subject of this first fairy tale, therefore, offers clues as to some of the reasons behind the use of the fantasy mode. To textualise one's life, to transform oneself and others into characters in a story allows the narrator to adopt a certain distance from her own predicament, thus being able to discuss events which might be emotionally charged from a different, detached perspective, in a dynamics which shares characteristics with the use of irony.

Later on, in hospital, as her neighbour and good friend Elsie Norris introduces Jeanette to the poetry of Swinburne, Blake, Rosetti and Yeats, "and the great effect of the imagination on the world" (ONF 30), Jeanette has an interesting revelation:

I understood this because I had been working on my peel igloo for weeks. Some days were a great disappointment, others a near triumph. It was a feat of balance and vision. Elsie was always encouraging, and told me not to mind the nurses. (ONF 30)

Here is Jeanette's resistance to power. Working on her orange peel igloo which she has been trying to build for weeks, she understands that sometimes her creative enterprise is near failure, others near success. With the "great effect of the imagination on the world" (ONF 30), however, everything—including trying to build an igloo out of orange peel—is, as Elsie teaches her, a "feat of balance and vision" (ONF 30). The nurses, who are obviously not impressed by Jeanette's attempts at fruit architecture, are not to be taken into consideration, just as any other external agents should not be, when one has any undertaking to complete. Understanding the world around her is the most important enterprise for Jeanette, especially when attending school after so many years of home education comes as



a bit of a shock, and her interest in featuring religious motifs for school tasks becomes a bit of a problem. The only way to transform the information she is given into ideas that make sense to her is to rearrange it, just like she does with the orange peel igloo. Thus, in her personal, poetic universe, the tetrahedron shape that her Mathematics teacher tries to make her understand becomes an emperor in a new fairy tale of her own making:

The emperor Tetrahedron lived in a palace made absolutely from elastic bands. To the right, cunning fountains shot elastic jets, subtle as silk; to the left, ten minstrels played day and night on elastic lutes.

The emperor was beloved by all. (ONF 47)

Her story about emperor Tetrahedron allows Jeanette to understand that it does not matter that she feels misunderstood at school despite her attempts to be accepted by teachers and peers, because “no emotion is the final one” (ONF 48) and change is inevitable.

The next fairy tale which weaves itself into the narrative is also related to Jeanette’s need to articulate her inner feelings. It is initially inspired by the Pastor’s sermon on perfection: “it was at this moment,” she says, “that I began to develop my first theological disagreement” (ONF 58). The Pastor’s pronouncement that perfection equals flawlessness is enough to trigger in the young girl’s mind her own view on perfection, through the fairy tale of “a woman who was so beautiful that the mere sight of her healed the sick and gave a good omen to the crops” (ONF 58-59). In a reversal of the traditional fairy-tale code, the woman is, apart from very beautiful, “very wise too” (ONF 59), and a bit of an expert on the law of physics, whereas the prince who is looking for the perfect

wife is described as “pretty” (ONF 59). For some time, all the assistants to the prince look for the perfect woman but to no avail until, one day, the advisor finds this undetected gem hiding in the woods. Disappointment, however, is soon felt, especially when it is discovered that the woman is not so perfect, for she is unwilling to get married; “[i]t’s not something I am very interested in,” she argues (ONF 61). When the prince himself decides to visit her in order to make her change her mind about the married state, she takes him into her hut for three days and three nights. This is the omniscient narrator’s explanation when he finally comes out of the hut:

The woman was indeed perfect, there was no doubt about that, but she wasn’t flawless. He, the prince, had been wrong. She was perfect because she was a perfect balance of qualities and strengths. She was symmetrical in every respect. The search for perfection, she had told him, was in fact the search for balance, for harmony. And she showed him Libra, the scales, and Pisces, the fish, and last of all put out her two hands. ‘Here is the clue,’ she said. ‘Here in this first and personal balance’. (ONF 62)

Here is a bold woman, who proves to the prince the futility in his search for perfection and finally makes him understand that perfection does not equal flawlessness, as opposed to Pastor Spratt’s beliefs, but balance, symmetry, and harmony: “she showed him Libra, the scales, and Pisces, the fish, and last of all put out her two hands” (ONF 62). When the wise woman confronts the prince in public, however, she is executed. As Jeanette wisely suggests, the fairy tale is provided as a response to her “first theological disagreement” (ONF 58), a

disagreement which, at this point, can only be expressed through the private realm of fantasy, due to the confusion involved in the questioning of the only foundation for her understanding of the world. Still, it is not only the church views that Jeanette is contradicting here, but also her mother's. The older woman is represented in the fairy tale through the figure of the dictator, the prince, whose unbalanced views cannot be contradicted in public, and whose authority is effectively jeopardised by the wise woman's alternative opinions. Hence, this fairy tale suggests that there might be alternatives to the mother's perspective and, although within the tale there cannot be found a clear alter ego to Jeanette, she wittily constructs the cautionary figure of the woman whose head is chopped off as a punishment for contradicting the pre-established authority. In other words, Jeanette knows about her desire to disagree given the dogmatism of the mother's and the church's position, but she also perceives that, at this stage, her disagreement should be kept in private, to herself. Making a public declaration of rights might be the cause for severe punishment, hence the fate of the woman within the tale. At the end of this particular fable, Jeanette introduces an ironic reference to the monster in *Frankenstein* —“this geezer gets a bolt through the neck...” (ONF 65)¹³— which suggests the danger inherent to an obsessive pursuit for perfection. On the one hand, it gives birth to grotesque monsters; on the other, it ends in death and devastation for all.

The cautionary overtones embedded in the tale about the prince who searched for perfection are felt again in the brief allegorical passage at the end of the chapter entitled “Numbers”, where Jeanette refers to the incidents surrounding the Winter Palace of the Russian royal family in 1917. Before she actually glides

into fairy-tale mode, the narrative offers an interchange between Jeanette and Melanie in which they debate whether their relationship would be described as an “Unnatural Passion” (ONF 86). They conclude that this must not be the case, as it “doesn’t feel like it. According to Pastor Finch, that’s awful” (ONF 86). In their description of the arrangements for the Harvest Festival Banquet, Jeanette refers to the gathering that the church community represent as “Our family. It was safe” (ONF 86). At this point the narrative is interrupted to offer a fictionalised version of the events which occurred during the 1917 revolution in Russia, by which the rebels got drunk on the wine cellar of the Winter Palace and destroyed everything: “[o]utside, the rebels storm the Winter Palace” (ONF 87). The rebel attack and subsequent chaos is equated, therefore, to the anticipation that Jeanette feels by which the security that both she and Melanie have expressed about their relationship and their belonging to this “family” (ONF 86) will soon be lost. The allegorical passage is related to the undercurrent of fear about lesbian sexuality and desire within the religious community, and it serves Jeanette to propose a cautionary vision about her future situation as a lesbian within this community.

Jeanette’s fears could not be more right. Once her relationship with Melanie is discovered, and the pastor accuses the two girls of ‘sin’, the mother and the elders of the church decide to exorcise Jeanette of the ‘demon’ she has inside, given that she refuses to repent. Belonging to this family, as the allegorical passage of the Winter Palace warned, is not safe, after all. Hence, “Joshua”, the chapter in which this exorcism, together with its consequences, is described, is central for the discussion of the articulation of lesbian desire within *Oranges*.

The discovery that Jeanette and Melanie are having a relationship of the kind which is not accepted within the community, together with the administration of punishment in the form of an exorcism which the elders perform on Jeanette, undoubtedly make her understand that she is different from what her mother and her community expected. Difference, once more, is related, within the totalitarian view of the church, with an evil that should be purged. It is probably due to the fact that Jeanette’s refusal to repent make the elders lock her up in the parlour with no food for thirty-six hours that she becomes delirious, and so the chapter is permeated by dreams, hallucinations and fantasies which are effectively related to Jeanette’s discovery and articulation of her desire and her sexuality. These visions will not abandon her once she pretends to accept the authority of the church and repent, in clear evidence that it is from this moment on, that she has made an active choice about her desire, her sexuality and, hence, her subjectivity. By bringing into narrative focus the hallucinatory sections, Winterson tellingly offers the reader a map of Jeanette’s psychic state, of the way she feels about her situation, and of her present relation with her mother, who plays a disturbingly prominent part during the exorcism.

Over the thirty-six hours in which Jeanette is locked up in the parlour, she thinks about the demon “and other things besides” (ONF 105). The first thing she asks herself is: “[c]an love really belong to the demon?” (ONF 106), a question for which she has no answer, but which pertinently gives rise to further questions. This is probably what triggers the apparition of the orange demon, who is nonchalantly “[l]eaning on the coffee table” (ONF 106) and who comes, he argues, to “help [her] decide what [she] wants” (ONF 106). Although Jeanette

does not seem to have answers to her own questions at this stage, the demon appears to offer a little help on this issue as well. When she asks him whether demons are evil, he answers that “they’re just different, and difficult” (ONF 106), and to Jeanette’s response that in the Bible they keep getting driven out, he wittily advises her that she should not believe all that she reads (ONF 106). The demon’s answers—which are the answers of Jeanette’s unconscious—are interesting to assess. On the one hand, he effectively dismantles the church’s fiercely dichotomised belief in ‘good’ and ‘evil’ in his description of demons as “just different, and difficult” (ONF 106). Here, the demon is pointing to a worldview beyond binaries, in a third space where ‘good’ and ‘evil’ might not be opposites, and ‘different’, for the first time in the narrative, becomes a possibility. On the other hand, he clearly unauthorises the absolute discursive power of the Bible by pointing out to Jeanette that she should not blindly believe in everything she reads.¹⁴ This piece of advice is all the more effective in so far as it comes shortly after the chapter entitled “Deuteronomy”, where an adult and as yet unknown narrative voice has discussed issues about the presumed dichotomy of fact and fiction. In effect, not believing everything one reads, keeping a critical attitude, becomes, in Jeanette’s case, a question of survival. Acknowledging that the demon on her coffee table may not be ‘bad’ is a positive deviation from the teachings that the elders are trying to impose through their exorcisms, their disciplines and punishments.

Being, as it is, a symbol for Jeanette’s lesbian desire, the orange demon teaches her that desire is an integral part of her and, hence, it cannot be ‘evil’, thus transgressing the reducing possibilities which the church and the mother offer in

their binary disposition of the world. Likewise, although desire cannot be escaped, it can be temporarily denied for pragmatic reasons, which is what Jeanette decides to do with the orange demon at this stage:

...I felt a prickle at the back of my neck.

‘Go away,’ I hissed. ‘They’ll see you.’ I opened an eye to check.

‘Not them,’ replied the demon, ‘they talk a lot but they don’t see nothing.’

‘I’m not getting rid of you, this is the best way I can think of.’

‘Oh, that’s fine,’ trilled the demon, ‘I was just passing’ (ONF 107).

What Jeanette does not fully acknowledge at this particular moment is that desire is never “just passing” (ONF 107) but, on the contrary, it will progressively resurface until she is made to confront it and accept it. For the moment, however, Jeanette theorises about her choice also through the deployment of the fairy-tale mode. Her references to the City of Lost Chances are a reflection of what happens to those who, like her, repress their desires: “[t]he City of Lost Chances is full of those who chose the wall” (ONF 110). As a location, the City of Lost Chances is closely related, within Jeanette’s fantastic scenario, to the Forbidden City, inhabited by those who are not brave enough to renounce security. In the extract where she explains the geographic characteristics of the two, Jeanette also makes reference to the nursery rhyme of Humpty Dumpty, who is forever altered by his fall from the wall, and is never put “together again” (ONF 110). The imagery here suggests that Jeanette, like Humpty Dumpty, will also be metamorphosed by her fall from the wall, in her case, her fall *outside* the wall.

The symbolism of the wall is interesting to consider. The excerpt uses walls in their dual purpose: on the one hand, they protect what they guard from outside invasions whereas, on the other hand, they also stand as confining and prohibitive instruments. The symbol of the wall as a boundary which Jeanette needs to transgress if she is to accept her desire becomes very effective within the narrative, for it offers a theorisation about the choices she has, at all times articulated within the context of her lesbian sexuality, and the effect that her choice will have on her subjectivity:

To eat of the fruit means to leave the garden because the fruit speaks of other things, other longings. So at dusk you say goodbye to the place you love, not knowing if you can ever return, knowing you can never return by the same way as this. It may be, some other day, that you will open a gate by chance, and find yourself again at the other side of the wall. (ONF 120)

Jeanette's choice to transgress the ambiguous wall of security and repression that her mother and the religious community have solidly built around her is finally made or, at least that is what the orange demon assures her when he passes on to her "a rough round pebble" (ONF 111), in itself a symbol for the said choice. Leaving the wall and its symbolism behind also entails the refreshing possibility of a subjectivity which is not imposed from the outside, but one which is built according to her own worldview. The process of leaving home, however, cannot be verbalised in the realistic narrative, hence Jeanette's concentration in the next chapter, "Judges", on the re-deployment of the narratives of Sir Perceval, which allow her to explore her contradictory feelings for what she is leaving

behind. The story of Sir Perceval, the hero of Arthurian legends, is intertwined with the tale of Winnet Stonejar and the sorcerer, and the outcome of the two is presented in the final chapter, “Ruth”, which textualises Jeanette’s final departure for the city and away from her community.

The two inset narratives allow Jeanette to express feelings and longings which cannot be articulated in the realistic narrative. An example of this articulation is Sir Perceval’s nostalgia for the home he has left behind when he made the choice to pursue his quest:

Tonight, bitten and bruised, [Sir Perceval] dreams of Arthur’s court, where he was the darling, the favourite. He dreams of his hounds and his falcon, his stable and his faithful friends. His friends are dead now. Dead or dying. He dreams of Arthur sitting on a wide stone step, holding his head in his hands. Sir Perceval falls to his knees to clasp his lord, but his lord is a tree covered in ivy. He wakes, his face bright with tears. (ONF 133)

In this quote, Sir Perceval’s feelings equal those of Jeanette, who is, like Perceval, prey to the nostalgia for what she has left behind. The choice of an Arthurian legend is interesting as far as the symbolism of the quest is concerned. On the one hand, the time Sir Perceval spends in the woods on his own is described as a kind of limbo, reinforcing the feeling that the wood symbolises a pre-social space; in other words, a place where social rules do not apply:

On the first day and the second day and the third day, Perceval could have turned back, he was still within the sphere of Merlin. On the fourth day, the woods were wild and forlorn, and he did not know

where he was, or even *what had driven him there*. (ONF 161, my italics)

The woods are described in the above quote as a locus for desire. On the first and second days, Perceval could have gone back home, for “he was still within the sphere of Merlin” (ONF 161), that is, he was still near Camelot and all the social and cultural values which it upholds and represents. The woods, however, exert their magical influence and encapsulate the knight until he does not “know where he [is]” (ONF 161) or, more to the point “what had driven him there” (ONF 161). It is not that he does not know about the nature of his quest but, rather, that Perceval does not find words to express the pull that compels him forward. In other words, he is unable to describe the desire embedded in the fulfilment of his quest for something which he does not really know exists, the Holy Grail. Sir Perceval’s quest is effectively equated to Jeanette’s in so far as it is also desire — although of a different nature— which governs it.

Later on, Sir Perceval has an interesting dream, which brings into focus the faultlines inherent to his choice: “[w]hen he slept that night he dreamed he was a spider hanging a long way down a huge oak. Then a raven came and flew through his thread, so that he dropped to the ground and scuttled away” (ONF 168). The thread, which is one of the elements that the Sir Perceval narrative has in common with the Winnet Stonejar tale, is a symbol for the inescapable pull that humans feel for what is known, for home. In this sense, it also represents society and the power that the apparently comfortable Symbolic exerts on the human psyche. Sir Perceval needs to cut the thread so that he can “[scuttle] away” (ONF 168); that is,

so that he can liberate himself from this almost magic pull that society exerts, in order to pursue his individual quest.

The parallelism with Jeanette’s situation is obvious. In order to fulfil her own quest, Jeanette also needs to cut the invisible thread which unites her to her mother and her community. This split does not entail irrevocable separation from them; after all, at the end of the novel, Jeanette goes back home for Christmas. What she needs, rather, is to cut the psychological thread which would otherwise paralyse her, render her unable to move forward.

In the Winnet story, the reader also finds evident correspondences between the protagonist and Jeanette herself; these correspondences start with their names. Winnet Stonejar is a playful corruption not just of Jeanette’s name, but that of the author, Jeanette Winterson. By providing Winnet’s name, and making her a main character in the tale, not a secondary character within the fabulous narratives, Winterson amply demonstrates the centrality that Jeanette’s subjectivity has acquired at this stage of the novel.

In the fairy tale, Winnet meets a sorcerer who wants to instruct her as his apprentice, for he has realised that she has “gifts” and she “can take the message to other places” (ONF 139). Winnet spends so much time at the sorcerer’s castle that she “forgot how she had come there, or what she had done before” (ONF 141). Hence, her former life becomes a kind of limbo, by which Winnet becomes a *tabula rasa* the identity of whom is effectively provided by the sorcerer. When she becomes friends with a boy, the sorcerer gets angry at this friendship which he understands as a betrayal, and turns Winnet out, in an obvious parallel of Jeanette’s relationship with Melanie, and later Katy, and the outcome of it at the

hands of her mother. Winnet, like Jeanette, gets distressed, but Abdenego, her favourite raven, tells her that leaving does not entail losing her power, just using it differently. The advice which Winnet gets from Abdenego parallels the dialogue that Jeanette has with her hallucinatory orange demon, both representing the voice from her own unconscious. As is the case with Jeanette in relation to the orange demon, Abdenego drops a rough brown pebble which Winnet catches, clearly symbolising the fact that the choice of leaving home has finally been made (ONF 144). These parallelisms point to the general structuring of the narrative, which follows a construction similar to that of Chinese boxes —within the realistic narrative, Jeanette hallucinates the orange demon, which has an alter ego in Abdenego in the fairy-tale digression. Further evidence of this cross-pollination of references is the fact that, before Winnet leaves, the sorcerer has time to tie an invisible thread around one of her buttons (ONF 144), in an image which now echoes the thread in the narratives of Sir Perceval described above.

A wise woman finds Winnet on the river side and revives her by means of herbs. She also teaches Winnet the new language of the place she now inhabits, a language in which Winnet is never proficient (ONF 148), in a clear allusion to desire, which escapes effective and complete verbalisation. The tale ends with the reference to the beautiful city which Winnet has heard of, and to her longing to go there, until:

She rows out to the sea, and stores her boat for a day, until she gets used to the salt taste and how big it all is. The need for the city fastens her heart to her mind. She will get in her boat and sail to the other

side. The sail is pulling and the sun is out. Now there is nothing about her but water. One thing is certain, she can't go back. (ONF 155)

Like Sir Perceval's stay in the woods, Winnet's sail across the sea which surrounds her completely —“[n]ow there is nothing about her but water” (ONF 155)— can also be read in terms of desire and the quest. The last time the reader hears of Winnet, portrayed in the above quote, she finds herself in the no-(wo)man's-land of the encircling waters, away from the sorcerer, and the society and the values which he represents, away also from the gentle woman who took care of her and taught her a new language, alone with the desire to discover the beautiful city and the quest she is to realise there.

4.4 In the city

Un libro que no encierra su contralibro es considerado incompleto —Jorge Luis Borges, “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis, Tertius”, in “El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan”, *Ficciones*, 56

Had Jorge Luis Borges read *Oranges*, he would probably have described it as a ‘complete’ book, a novel of the type the inhabitants of his fictional world, Tlön, would have liked to read. Winterson's initially purely realistic narrative contains its fantastic counter-narrative which, in turn, allows the novel to become whole, complete, in Borges's words. Jeanette's situation as a lesbian subject in a hostile environment demonstrates that escaping the realistic narrative is, paradoxical as this may seem, a question of coherence. In this respect, she is in a similar position to Sam, one of the protagonists of Norman Mailer's *The Man Who Studied Yoga* (1968). At Marvin's enquiry of whether he has given up his novel, Sam answers that he is unable to find a suitable form, for he does not want

to write a realistic novel when reality is no longer realistic (Mailer 1968: 84). Winterson's heroine seems to have found the solution to this predicament through the interweaving of fantasy and reality.¹⁵

In her study, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981), Rosemary Jackson demonstrates how fantasy is intricately related to the articulation of desire, resorting to Todorov's definition of literature of the fantastic —“concerned to describe desire in its excessive forms” (1981: 3)— to support her point. In turn, literary fantasy, Jackson argues, propounds a “violation of dominant assumptions”, which “threatens to subvert ... rules and conventions taken to be normative” (1981: 14). The means by which this transgression of “dominant assumptions”, “rules and conventions taken to be normative” (Jackson 1981: 14) takes place, aligns the genre of literary fantasy to the more traditional genre of *menippea* where “states of hallucination, eccentric behaviour and speech, personal transformation, extraordinary situations were the norm” (Jackson 1981: 14). Throughout “Joshua”, Jeanette's state of hallucination, her eccentric behaviour and speech, and the extraordinary situation in which she is immersed, which, in turn, gives rise to her personal transformation, is reaffirming Jackson's definition of *menippea* above. Altogether, her fantastic state also allows her to subvert the “rules and conventions taken to be normative” (Jackson 1981: 14) within her community.

Through her dialogic interactions with the orange demon, a creature which she effectively creates and, therefore, originates from her, Jeanette demonstrates that (diabolic) Otherness is not located “out there” (Jackson 1981: 53), as early romance fantasies upheld, but that hers is a state more in tune with nineteenth-

century fantasies, which, according to Jackson, “reveal the *internal* origin of the other” (1981: 55, italics in original). Jeanette goes a step further from her nineteenth-century antecedents to illustrate how, if the origin of this other is *internal*, it is, therefore, far from demonic, evil, or even terrifying. On the contrary, it is merely an aspect of herself, “a *manifestation of unconscious desire*” (Jackson 1981: 55, my italics). The thing to be registered about this manifestation of desire is that it is, in Flora Alexander’s words, “a powerfully subversive force” (1989: 64).

The subversive nature of desire, its potential to destabilise authority, is brought to the fore by Winterson’s narrative in so far as her mixing of genres demonstrates that desire always has the capacity to interrupt —subvert— reality and confirm its incoherence or, even, its inability to offer a somewhat ‘complete’ picture of the world. The final effect of these multiple interruptions to the realistic narrative creates a space which could be described as a ‘heterotopia’, a term coined by Foucault in *The Order of Discourse: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1970), and explored at length by Brian McHale in *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987). In his discussion about *heterotopia*, Foucault argues that:

There is a worse kind of disorder than that of the *incongruous*, the linking together of things that are inappropriate; I mean the disorder in which fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry, of the *heteroclite*; ... in such a state, things are ‘laid’, ‘placed’, ‘arranged’ in sites so very different from one another that it is impossible to find a place of residence for them, to define a *common locus* beneath them all [...]

Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that.

(McHale 1987: 44, italics in original)

Thus, in the 'heterotopia', Foucault argues, "fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension ... of the *heteroclite*" (McHale 1987: 44, italics in original), which makes the 'heterotopia' disturbing in so far as it demonstrates how language irremediably fails in its attempt to offer an absolute definition, "because [heterotopias] make it impossible to name this and that" (McHale 1987: 44).

Foucault's definition of 'heterotopia' has some points in common with the more popularised Bakhtinian term of 'heteroglossia', which Bakhtin specifically relates to the literary genre of the novel. According to Bakhtin, a novel is constructed "on concrete social speech diversity" (McHale 1987: 166), and:

The interweaving of different registers in the text of the novel produces the effect of *heteroglossia*, plurality of discourse; and it is this concrete *heteroglossia* which serves as the vehicle for the confrontation and dialogue among world-views and ideologies in the novel, its orchestrated *polyphony* of voices. (McHale 1987: 166, italics in original)

Bakhtinian 'heteroglossia', therefore, becomes a "vehicle for the confrontation and dialogue among world-views and ideologies in the novel" (McHale 1987: 166). In the present case, the 'heteroglossia' of her own text allows Jeanette to create a space where the dialogue between her alternative worldview and that of her mother's, even between her own clashing worldviews at certain moments, can

effectively take place. The relation between the polyphonic character of the novel and popular carnival practices is drawn by Bakhtin himself, who states that “[w]here the official genres are typically unitary, [...] projecting a single fictional world, carnivalised literature *interrupts* the text’s ontological ‘horizon’ *with a multiplicity of inserted genres*” (McHale 1987: 172, my italics). The carnivalisation of Jeanette’s narrative, through the infection of the realistic mode by the inset stories, allows *Oranges* to escape the “typically unitary” nature of the “official [genre]” (McHale 1987: 172) offering, instead, a text, the “ontological ‘horizon’” of which is constantly interrupted “with a multiplicity of inserted genres” (McHale 1987: 172). In turn, this arrested development of the text allows it to escape the authoritarian view by which only a “single fictional world” is conceivable (McHale 1987: 172).

The proposals of both Bakhtin and Foucault above offer fresh possibilities of dialogue between opposing worldviews and, most importantly, they allow for the creation of a “*common locus*” (McHale 1987: 44, italics in original) where these alternative dialogues and confrontations can be carried out competently. The utopic essence of such a locus in the shape of a third space in relation to lesbian fiction is assessed by Elizabeth Gross and Ellen Probyn in *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism* (1995), where they denominate this utopic space “virtually lesbian”, and describe it as “a space that takes its own importance for granted without claiming a utopic innocence” (1995: 108). In the “virtually lesbian” locus which Jeanette creates within *Oranges*, the lesbian subject effectively becomes the ‘centre’, without being ‘opposed to’. In relation to this, Susana Onega, alludes to the way in which fantasy within *Oranges* creates “a

space of epistemological uncertainty where the real and the unreal coexist” (1995a: 142); and, more to the point, she assesses how Winterson creates a “no-woman’s-land where her lesbian heroine can truly fulfil her innermost desires” (1995a: 143). Although I agree with Onega’s description of the third space as one of “epistemological uncertainty” (1995a: 142) where Jeanette can “fulfil her innermost desires” (1995a: 143), I would go on to argue that it is precisely desire and the need to explore it which prompts Jeanette to create this alternative, fluid space where her desire is central, that is, not dichotomised, not opposed to.

The interest in escaping the dichotomies between ‘lesbian’ and ‘heterosexual’, which in turn is related to the subversion of the idea that being a lesbian is ‘opposed to’ being heterosexual, is explored throughout the novel, in the refusal to bestow a definite symbolic charge onto the recurrent motif of the orange. More specifically, however, this interest is visually articulated in the excerpt quoted in the previous section, where Jeanette discusses spatial dichotomies, and the impact which falling outside the wall, in Humpty-Dumpty style, will have on her life. In her introduction to *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories/Gay Theories* (1991), Diana Fuss argues that: “[t]he philosophical opposition between ‘heterosexual’ and ‘homosexual’, like so many other conventional binaries, has always been constructed on the foundations of another related opposition: the couple ‘inside’ and ‘outside’”(1991: 1). Fuss, however, goes on to say that current efforts in Lesbian and Gay Theories suggest that sexual possibilities are no longer thinkable in terms of a simple inside/outside dialectic (1991: 1). For Fuss, the inside/outside motif is “a structure of exclusion, oppression and repudiation,” and “[i]nterrogating the position of ‘outsiderness’ is

where much Lesbian and Gay Theory begins” (1991: 2). This interrogation is, in turn, intimately related to the processes by which sexual borders are constructed, by which “[i]t may be ... accurate to say that the homosexual, *occupying the frontier position of inside out*, is neither completely outside the bounds of sexual difference nor wholly inside it either” (Fuss 1991: 6, my italics). Hence, Jeanette’s argument about leaving the safety of the wall is by no means a final move: “[s]o at dusk you say goodbye to the place you love, not knowing if you can ever return, knowing you can never return by the same way as this. *It may be, some other day, that you will open a gate by chance, and find yourself again at the other side of the wall*” (ONF 120, my italics). This excerpt illustrates how, for Jeanette, her choice of crossing the boundary and stepping outside the wall is by no means definite for, as she argues, maybe some other day she might find herself “again at the other side of the wall” (ONF 120). Her interest in blurring the binary that the visual motif of the wall itself establishes, institutes a view of lesbian desire which is in tune with the one Fuss offered above. Jeanette views her desire as occupying a Humpty-Dumpty, “frontier position of inside out” (Fuss 1995: 6), in a fluidity which allows her to open alternative gates by chance, and to return to the place she loves through course routes: “knowing you can never return by the same way as this” (ONF 120).

Jeanette’s articulation of lesbian desire is described by Gabrielle Griffin as “an almost ‘instinctive’ affirmation of lesbianism; not her, but those around her agonise about her lesbian experiences” (Wisker 1994: 86). In her wise choice to reject the religious community’s view of lesbian desire as a problem, a disease, or even a sin, and accept desire, rather, “as a necessary aspect of her sense of self”

(Wisker 1994: 87), Jeanette is also denying any negative stereotype of lesbians. Her determination to accept desire as a necessary aspect of her self, is related to her leaving the community and their exclusion of the possibility of a subject who experiences lesbian desire unhindered (Wisker 1994: 88). Thus, she moves to the city, in a defiance of authority caused by desire which, in turn, propels her into the unknown of her desire.¹⁶

Jeanette's sense of a fluid desire, her refusal to theorise sexual politics through the binary functions of 'inside' and 'outside', might be related to the interesting fact that throughout the text there is no mention of the term 'lesbian' as noted by Marshment and Hallam (Hamer & Budge 1994: 164),¹⁷ by which the narrative's refusal to classify goes beyond its choice of a unique, official, unitary genre, and ties in with Foucault's theorisation above, according to which 'heterotopias' are disturbing in their demonstration that an absolute definition is ludicrous, and that it is "*impossible to name this and that*" (McHale 1987: 44, my italics).

In this respect, the manipulation of point of view, which allows the reader's integral identification with Jeanette, is effective precisely because the text "presents Jeanette's lesbianism as something that, from her point of view —and therefore also from the viewer's— just *is*" (Hamer & Budge 1994: 164, italics in original). With this presentation, Marshment and Hallam argue, lesbianism is effectively naturalised in the same way that heterosexuality is naturalised in most texts and the need to offer a specific explanation of it is not felt (Hamer & Budge 1994: 164).

The naturalisation of lesbian desire is related to the novel's interest in offering a wide range of lesbian subject positions, thus underlying the fluidity of such a position. Within the narrative context of the novel, Jeanette is not the only subject to express a desire which might be deemed 'deviant' for the community to which she belongs. The women who work at the paper shop, whom Jeanette likes "a lot" because they sometimes offer a banana bar with her comic (ONF 7), are described by Jeanette's mother as "dealing with unnatural passions" (ONF 7) and, although the child wonders whether she means that "they put chemicals in their sweets" (ONF 7), the reader automatically decodifies mother's comment—and her subsequent prohibition that the child buys her comic from them—as hinting at their relationship being of a lesbian nature. Another character who expresses an alternative desire is Miss Jewbury. Initially described through the mysterious comment "not holy" by Mrs White (ONF 25), Miss Jewsbury is constantly resorted to when Jeanette is in trouble, offering help and support. Later, she is positioned as a foil to Jeanette by describing her lesbian sexuality as "a problem" (ONF 104), a definition which Jeanette blatantly refuses. Miss Jewsbury's most shocking revelation, both to Jeanette and the reader, is related to Jeanette's mother, Louie, whom Miss Jewsbury describes as "a woman of the world, even though she'd never admit it to me. She knows about feelings, especially women's feelings" (ONF 104). The suggestion that Jeanette's mother could have experienced lesbian desire is something Jeanette does not want to "go into" (ONF 104), although such a discovery is not new. When going through the 'Old Flames' section in her photograph album, a very young Jeanette asks her mother about the "yellowy picture of a pretty woman holding a cat" (ONF 36), to which the mother

answers: “‘That? Oh [she’s] just Eddie’s sister, I don’t know why I put it in there” (ONF 36). The next time mother and daughter looked through the album, the picture has mysteriously vanished (ONF 36). Hence, mother’s past is exorcised and cleansed.

Oranges’ interest in revealing lesbian desire as something fluid is related to the novel’s presentation of a multiplicity of lesbian subjects who range from the natural fashion in which the women at the paper shop live their relationship, to the painful secretiveness with which Miss Jewsbury experiences her situation as a lesbian within the religious community, to the absolute obliteration of Jeanette’s mother’s lesbian flings in the past, to the presumed heterosexualisation which Melanie undergoes under social pressure. This multiplicity of positions, however, is explored at its best through the character of Jeanette, who creates, through the use of fantasy and fairy tales, an alternative space where her lesbian desire can effectively be articulated. In her attempt to theorise her subject position, Jeanette textualises her subjectivity which, in turn, produces an effect by which a multiplicity of identities within the subject Jeanette are produced and celebrated. The next section of this study will assess how such a production takes place.

Notes

¹ A good summary of and theoretical approach to Terry Castle’s theory of the ghosting of the lesbian subject in texts and culture may be found in Lucie Armitt’s *Contemporary Women’s Fiction and the Fantastic*, pp. 106-107. See the **Works Cited** section of the present study for full publication details.

² For further contextualisations of lesbian fiction, see *Contemporary Lesbian Writing: Dreams, Desire, Difference*, by Paulina Palmer (1993); *Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, edited by Snitow, Stansell and Thompson (1983) and *What Lesbians Do in Books*, edited by Hobby and White in 1991. Full publication details are provided under the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

³ This is the terminology used by Radclyffe Hall to describe Stephen, for the author conforms to Krafft-Ebing’s theories on homosexuality, by which lesbians were men trapped in the wrong female bodies.

⁴ Hall’s lesbian is commonly referred to as ‘butch’, a term first used by Sigmund Freud in “The Sexual Aberrations” (1905), where he divides women who love women into “butches” and “femmes”. The otherwise called “active invert”, according to Freud, generally exhibited both mental and physical masculine characteristics and looked for femininity (hence, “femme”) in her love object. Faderman notes how: “Neither [Freud] nor Hall seemed to be aware that if some lesbian relationships were based on such patterns it was because women were emulating the only examples of domestic situations available to them in a patriarchal culture, that they often felt compelled to force themselves into these roles and did not assume them by inborn or trauma-acquired impulses” (1991 [1981]: 323). The popularity of both Freud and Hall served to promote the (wrong) idea that a lesbian relationship required a ‘butch’ and a ‘femme’. “The Sexual Aberrations” is included in volume 18 of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (1953-1965). Judith Roof’s *A Lure of Knowledge: Lesbian Sexuality and Theory* (1991) offers interesting insights on Freud’s texts on lesbianism. For full publication details, see the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

⁵ For further discussion of Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*, see Lilian Faderman’s article “Radclyffe Hall and the Lesbian Image,” in *Conditions* (publication details under the **Works Cited** section of the present study).

⁶ For the titles and publication details of these works, see the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

⁷ Clemence Dane is a *nom de plume*, the real name of the author is Winifred Ashton.

⁸ The subversion of the *Bildungsroman* mode proposed by *Oranges* has been discussed in the previous section of this study. Further elements of this subversion —such as that of a solid, coherent subjectivity— will be assessed later.

⁹ In *The Girl: Constructions of the Girl in Contemporary Fiction by Women*, Ruth O. Saxon claims that “[s]uch themes as individuation from the mother, maternal loss or overpresence —[...] continue to inform *Künstlerroman*, narratives of female coming-of-age” (1998: xi), by which the maternal presence or lack of it becomes a motif common to the ‘feminisation’ of this genre. See the **Works Cited** section of the present study for full publication details of Saxon’s text.

¹⁰ Later, the spiritual solace that Elsie offers will be transformed into physical solace, for the older woman allows Jeanette and Melanie to meet at her house, away from maternal and religious surveillance.

¹¹ A thorough summary of the research which has been done on traditional fairy tales may be found in chapter 5 of Lucy Armit’s *Contemporary Women’s Fiction and the Fantastic*, which is entitled “Fairies and Feminism: Alice Thomas Ellis, Fay Weldon and Elizabeth Baines” (pp. 130-159). In relation to this topic, see also Ellen Cronan Rose’s “Through the Looking Glass: When Women Tell Fairy Tales,” in *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, edited by Abel, Hirsch, and Langland (pp. 209-227). For full publication details, see the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

¹² For a compilation of contemporary feminist fairy tales, see Jack Zipes’s *Don’t Bet On the Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England*. Zipes is also the author of two other interesting studies on this genre; namely, *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood: Versions of the Tale in Sociocultural Context*, and *Fairy Tales and the Act of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization*, both published in 1983. For the publication details of these works, see the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

¹³ The reference is probably to the adaptation of Mary Shelley’s novel which James Whale produced in 1931, and in which the creature was played by a memorable Boris Karloff (Simpson 2001: 28).

¹⁴ The advice is all the more effective and subversive if it is understood in the light of Jeanette’s reaction on reading “Beauty and the Beast”, and taking its message in a literal way. Hence, both the Bible and fairy tales are partly jeopardised as works of authority, by which they are put on a par, acquiring a similar status within Winterson’s text.

¹⁵ Although offering a contrast between the novel and its screen adaptation would be too extensive an enterprise for the present study, I would like to direct the readers to Chapter VI in Gina Wisker’s *It’s My Party: Reading Twentieth-Century Women’s Writing* (1994), which focuses exclusively on the screening of *Oranges*. This chapter, written by Marilyn Brooks, and entitled “From Vases to Tea-Sets: Screening Women’s Writing” (in Wisker 1994: 129-144), contributes a critique of the BBC adaptation of Winterson’s novel, which was screened in three parts during 1989, with very successful audience rates. According to Brooks, the inset narratives, fables and fairy tales which become so important in the text version of the novel were deemed dispensable in the screen adaptation, “because their function could be taken over by the camera itself” (Brooks 1994: 132). However, for Brooks, the exclusion of the inset narratives “enforces a very different point of view which the novel resists: that the oppression experienced by Jess is particular, rather than general” (Brooks 1994: 132). I agree with Brooks in that the result is a narrowing of possibilities, which Brooks bases on three main aspects of the novel which the screening proves unable to articulate. To start with, the novel is constantly at pains to demonstrate “how ‘demon-possessed’ Jess is, beyond religious intolerance”; secondly, the chapter headings of the novel, borrowed from the Bible and silenced in the series, have the power to “emphasise the intrusive nature of historical ‘truth’”; finally, the sense of the difficulty in breaking with the past is exclusively explored in the novel through the narratives of Sir Perceval and Winnet Stonejar, and they are also non-existent in the screen version (Brooks 1994: 133). For further discussions on the screening of *Oranges*, see “From String of Knots to Orange Box: Lesbianism on Prime Time”, by M. Marshment and J. Hallam, in *The Good, the Bad and the Gorgeous: Popular Culture’s Romance with Lesbianism*, D. Hamer and B. Budge (eds.) 1994. Publication details are provided under the **Works Cited** section.

¹⁶ Gabrielle Griffin identifies urban migration as a key motif in most lesbian texts (Wisker 1994: 88).

¹⁷ Marshment and Hallam also refer to the term ‘homosexual’ as not appearing in the novel. This declaration is not completely true, as can be seen in the extract in which Jeanette discusses her mother’s remark that a gay man “[s]hould have been a woman” (ONF 126). This assertion on the part of her mother, triggers Jeanette’s discussion on male homosexuality, in which she declares: “At that point I had no notion of sexual politics, but I knew that a homosexual is further away from a woman than a rhinoceros. Now that I do have a number of notions about sexual politics, this early observation holds good” (ONF 126). Hence, although it is inaccurate to say that there is no mention

throughout the novel of the word 'homosexual', Marshment and Hallam's proposition is right in so far as the word is not used to refer to women's homosexuality. Their final point that the novel refuses to classify Jeanette's desire through the use of any labelling is, therefore, legitimate.

5. "Not The Only Fruit": Jeanette in Con-Text

You might mutate —Jeanette Winterson, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, 156

In content and form, *Oranges* adjusts to the narrative pattern of the *Bildungsroman*. The novel's interest in following the development of a central character through experiences which will conform her rite of passage from childhood to adulthood would initially accentuate the points of contact that it shares with this genre. Moreover, the use of a pervasive first-person narrative voice which directly tells the reader about her own experience of the world and the predicament she finds herself in, thus creating an intimate link between reader and character, would also constitute another point in common with the *Bildungsroman* mode.

The traditional expression of the *Bildungsroman*, however, usually confers an ending marked by the ritual return of the protagonist to the home he/she left behind, which allows him/her to embrace his/her identity through the acceptance of his/her place in the community. With this decisive return home, the *Bildungsroman* precisely upholds the values of the said community, the narrative

wheel comes full circle, and the protagonist is eventually made to find the place within society which —it is presumed— had initially belonged to him/her. The legitimate social locus for the protagonist, therefore, had been there all along, he/she only had to discover it.¹

The ideological assumptions of this narrative form, therefore, tend to confirm a pre-existing *status quo*, mostly through the depiction of a protagonist who, by accepting his/her genuine place in society, is also acquiring, towards narrative conclusion, an unproblematic, solid, and coherent subjectivity. The use of a fiercely realistic mode and linear progression, with little or no digressions from the story line, likewise help to create the sense that the character the reader finds in the *denouement* of the narrative is complete, coherent, whole, and that he/she has achieved a subjectivity which reveals no faultlines. Further, this is a subjectivity which is not constructed, but discovered. In other words, subjectivity pre-existed the character, it was there for him/her to grasp, probably even before the story itself started; further, the story may be understood as a mere excuse to bespeak subjectivity, to bring it to the fore. This highlights the powerful operations of fate in the lives of individuals, and the idea that there is a unquestionable location for every individual within his/her society. The final ideological implication of the *Bildungsroman* would be, therefore, that humans are predetermined to acquire a subjectivity and a social status which was destined exclusively for them.

These ideological implications are entirely undermined by the kind of story which Jeanette Winterson offers in *Oranges*. On the one hand, the novel's main interest is in tracing the development of a lesbian character within a hostile

community, by which the reader automatically understands that the values of the said community will by no means be upheld but, on the contrary, they will be criticised as the operations of power which coerce the specific development of an initially free individual. On the other hand, there is a continuous pervasiveness of Coming-Out overtones throughout the narrative, by which this *Bildungsroman* of sorts becomes, rather, a means of acquiring a subjectivity which is *against* the social values pre-established from the start, thus highlighting the consequential part that difference plays in the development of the main protagonist in her specific context. Probably, the most important subversion of the mode aforementioned comes in the interesting mixture between realistic and fantastic elements which the novel proposes; its digressions, in other words, from a realistic narrative in linear progression. Hence, it is not only that the story Jeanette offers has a multiplicity of meanings, on which the previous section of this study has concentrated, but also that the subjectivity which springs from the narratological impulse is going to be likewise multiple, ambiguous, and in process. It will be the aim of the present section of this study to analyse the ways in which the intertwining of a character set in the realistic mode within a multiplicity of fantastic narratological counterparts allows Jeanette to construct a subjectivity which escapes completion, advocating, instead, for an ambiguity which celebrates the multiplicity of the subject and which the open-endedness of the novel likewise helps to produce.

5.1 Jeanette in the Real

We stood on the hill and my mother said, ‘This world is full of sin.’

We stood on the hill and my mother said, 'You can change the world.'—Jeanette Winterson, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, 10

Jeanette is a special girl. Her upbringing in an unnamed northern, working-class industrial town with adoptive parents who belong to an evangelical Christian community is enough to characterise her as an individual within a very specific context. Her childhood, likewise, is thoroughly permeated by the doctrine of the church, which includes a fundamentalist understanding of the Bible. Even the Sunday routines of the family are marked by an extravagant religious awareness:

Sunday was the Lord's day, the most vigorous day of the whole week.

[...] My mother got up early on Sundays and allowed no one into the parlour until ten o'clock. It was her place of prayer and meditation.

[...] She always prayed in exactly the same way. First of all she thanked God that she had lived to see another day, and then she thanked God for sparing the world another day. Then she spoke of her enemies, which was the nearest thing she had to a catechism.

As soon as 'Vengeance is mine saith the Lord' boomed though the wall into the kitchen, I put the kettle on. (ONF 4)

The punctuation of Sunday activities through the mother's repetitive prayer routines is fiercely felt throughout the above extract, where Jeanette describes her mother's meditation and holy utterances, which allow her to know the exact time at which she has to "put the kettle on" (ONF 4). Jeanette's belonging to the group creates a unique map of the world for the young girl, who is socially alienated from anything that goes on beyond it, as the above paragraph amply demonstrates

through the use of the metaphor of the mother’s prayers as the exclusive timing for the domestic chores.

The coherent tapestry which her mother tries to build through the extensive reading and fundamentalist understanding of the Bible, however, is soon subverted by alien agents. Thus, Jeanette remembers her early visit to a fairground, where a gypsy offered a most mysterious prediction: “‘You’ll never marry,’ she said, ‘not you, and you’ll never be still’” (ONF 7). Although, initially, this prediction has no hidden implications, it is soon connected, by the child’s powerful memory exercise, to the day in which her mother forbade her to keep on buying her comic from the local paper shop, owned by two unmarried women who, according to the mother “dealt in unnatural passions” (ONF 7). Hence, Jeanette’s choice to single out the gypsy’s prediction from amongst her childhood memories not only bestows the said prediction with a level of authority which comes, incidentally, from a person who has chosen an alternative lifestyle, but it effectively creates a sub-text where the implication of lesbianism is already hinted at. Jeanette, as the gypsy rightly says, will not get married, and she will never be still, much like the two women at the paper shop who are, implicitly, described as lesbians.

The mother’s report of the unmarried women at the paper shop qualifies her as a totalitarian character with little or no sympathy for those around her who do not conform to her strict worldview. Her lack of sympathy extends even to her own daughter, an instance of which is seen in the episode where Jeanette becomes temporarily deaf with her adenoids. Instead of taking the girl to the doctor for an early diagnosis, the mother and the rest of the members of the church identify her

condition as related to her being in a state of holy rapture: “Oh, it’s not surprising, she’s seven you know’ [...] ‘It’s a holy number, strange things happen in sevens’” (ONF 23). It is only due to Miss Jewbury’s intervention that the child is finally taken to hospital. The realisation that the church members proffered an erroneous interpretation of her state of deafness makes Jeanette aware that the church is not thoroughly competent as a source of knowledge: “[s]ince I was born I had assumed that the world ran on very simple lines, like a larger version of our church. Now I was finding that even the church was sometimes confused. This was a problem” (ONF 26-27). The confusion about Jeanette’s condition lays bare the faultlines in a community which, up to this stage, offered the idea that they held the absolute truth about all aspects of life, dominated by their solid source of their faith as having all answers for all questions. Ambiguity, any alternative interpretation of reality, is dismissed by them as unsuitable.

During her stay in hospital, Jeanette is left on her own by her mother, who is busy with chores for the church. In these moments of discomfort, Jeanette’s elder friend, Elsie Norris, effectively becomes a surrogate-mother figure who offers the support and nurture which Louie’s ambition to become a powerful member within the community denies to the child. Elsie’s comfort is as much physical as it is spiritual, and she competently helps Jeanette in her construction of an alternative world-view to her mother’s totalitarian approach: “‘There’s this world,’ [Elsie] banged the wall graphically, ‘and there’s this world,’ she thumped her chest. ‘If you want to make sense of either, you have to take notice of both’” (ONF 32). During her daily visits to the child in hospital, Elsie tells her stories and jokes, and she not only introduces Jeanette to the literature of Swinburne,

Blake, Rossetti and Yeats, but also teaches her the exciting possibilities of a multiple understanding of reality: “[w]hat looks like one thing ... may well be another” (ONF 30), she says. With Elsie, Jeanette also learns to discover literature and fantasy not only as a vessel of knowledge and pleasure, but as a means of extracting techniques of survival in a hostile world.

With such an unusual education for a child of her age, and between the conflicting forces of fundamental Evangelism and literary fantasy, Jeanette’s experience at school comes as a bit of a shock, both for her and for those who receive her into it. Her attempts at fitting in —“I tried to make myself as ordinary as possible” (ONF 38)— are only met with disapproval from peers and teachers alike, as evidenced in her choice of Jeremiah’s caption ‘The Summer Is Ended And We Are Not Yet Saved’ for her sewing-class sampler:

Mrs Virtue [Jeanette’s teacher] was a diplomatic woman, but she had her blind spots. When it came to listing all the samplers, she wrote the others out in full, and next to mine she put ‘Text’.

‘Why’s that?’ I asked.

‘You might upset the others’ she said.

[...]

I did upset the children. Not intentionally, but effectively. Mrs Sparrow and Mrs Spencer came to school one day all fluffed up with rage. [...] Then a boy came and hit me on the neck, then another and another, all hitting and running off. (ONF 38-39)

Jeanette’s situation of isolation, caused by the eccentric education she has received, is not understood by the teachers at school, much less by the rest of the

students. Even when the head teacher writes a letter of complaint to her mother, the mother is unable to sympathise with the girl's complex situation at school and simply points out that the faithful are "called to be apart" (ONF 42), thus making ostracism not just evident, but rightful. Far from despairing when her efforts are constantly frustrated, Jeanette finds solace in her striking potential for rewriting the reality around her through the use of fantasy and imagination, as her story of Emperor Tetrahedron suggests. This allows her to reach the conclusion that there might be nothing essentially wrong in her view of the world, as opposed to what the teachers believe:

What constitutes a problem is not the thing, or the environment where we find the thing, but the conjunction of the two; something unexpected in an usual place (our favourite aunt in our favourite poker parlour) or something usual in an unexpected place (our favourite poker in our favourite aunt). I knew that my sampler was absolutely right in Elsie Norris's front room, but absolutely wrong in Mrs Virtue's sewing class. (ONF 44)

Jeanette's conflict with the world beyond her household and her community is related to the story of the Israelites as it appears in the second book of the Old Testament, a relation established by the title for the chapter, "Exodus", and the reference to "the children of Israel [who] were guided by the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night" (ONF 47). In the Book of Exodus, the Israelites leave Egypt, with Moses as their leader. Jeanette is equated to these peoples when she is made to leave the apparent comfort of her home for the unknown, the presumed "Breeding Ground" (ONF 17) that school is. She draws

the parallelism with the biblical exodus and the two pillars that led the Israelites in order to express her own confusion at the rules which govern the world outside her community:

The pillar of cloud was a fog, perplexing and impossible. I didn't understand the ground rules. The daily world was a world of Strange Notions, without form, and therefore void. I comforted myself as best I could by always rearranging their version of the facts. (ONF 47)

Jeanette's adolescence is marked by the disconcerting information that she gathers about heterosexual relationships, both from her mother and her mother's friends and neighbours. Her distress is accentuated by her reading of fairy tales in the library, the most popular of which is “Beauty and the Beast”, and which allows the young reader to conclude that she has made an interesting and innovative discovery: “[t]here were a lot of women, and most of them got married. If they couldn't marry each other, and I didn't think they could, because of having babies, some of them would inevitable have to marry beasts” (ONF 71). Asking her mother about this situation does not help, either. Instead of unravelling the metaphor behind the politics of “Beauty and the Beast”, Louie advises Jeanette not to worry about these issues, as she has a bright future in missionary school. However, Jeanette understands that believing her mother is all the more difficult since she discovered the truth about Jane Eyre who does not marry St John Rivers, as the mother's rewriting of the original tale went, but chose, instead, the less holy Mr Rochester.

In an attempt not to disappoint her mother, Jeanette is determined to become a missionary, and momentarily forgets about the disillusionments inherent to

heterosexual romance of the Beauty-and-the-Beast kind. Romance, however, appears in Jeanette's life at the age of fourteen, in the market, and in the shape of Melanie, a girl who "was boning kippers on a big marble slab" (ONF 78). The two girls become friends, and Jeanette is thus able to tell Melanie about the congregation and invite her to the Sunday service. The irony about this particular service offered by Pastor Finch is that it contains a sermon thoroughly based on the unnatural passions, which prompts Melanie to confess publicly of her sins and join the community, as a consequence of which Jeanette becomes her religious counsellor.

Throughout the chapter "Numbers" the indication that Jeanette will involve herself in a lesbian relationship with Melanie is strongly felt. Her doubts and anxieties about the marriage state and her general dislike of men are related to her frustration at understanding that marriage is the only possibility for women, as the community at large believe, despite the complaints about their husbands that the women are constantly making, and which Jeanette keeps on overhearing, much to her chagrin. This disappointment is related to the expectations that Jeanette feels on meeting Melanie and her desire to see her every Saturday at the market. Their relationship is located within the context of the church, as Melanie becomes a new member, thus the community's rejection is laid bare, especially through Pastor Finch's choice for the unnatural passions as a subject for the sermon of the first service Melanie attends (ONF 83).

The community's furious attempts to reduce events to one single interpretation, which conforms their particular view of the world, are openly subverted in the next chapter, "Deuteronomy", the main interest of which is to

theorise about the presumed binary established between fact and fiction. “Deuteronomy” proposes stories as a means to find order and balance, in contrast to the deceptive sense of security suggested by inflexible history (ONF 93). This theoretical chapter, with an omniscient narrative voice, comes at a crucial moment in Jeanette’s fictional life, a moment in which she will become suspicious of the presumed safety and protection which the community seems to promise. Mimicking the importance its advice has in Jeanette’s life, the chapter occupies a central position in the novel, and it is located exactly in the middle of the book, by which it provides the sense that it is a landmark in Jeanette’s construction of her subjectivity or, rather, that its advice will become pivotal to this construction.

Behind “Deuteronomy”, there is the idea that a single, reducible understanding of facts is not possible. Hence, the chapter points to a multiplicity of interpretations, by which, if Jeanette follows its proposal, she will be able to construct a positive sense of her identity, one which is assembled from her own interpretation of her self, not from the position assigned to her by the community and their biased and intolerant understanding of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. The basis for a personal interpretation of life in Jeanette, however, has already been evidenced through her constant resort to fantasy in order to interpret the state of affairs around her in a more sympathetic manner: “I *comforted* myself as best I could by *always rearranging their version of the facts*” (ONF 47, my italics).

A personal interpretation of the facts which occur in her life will be useful to Jeanette once she and Melanie are accused of ‘sin’ and their relationship is condemned by the pastor, who describes the girls as being “under Satan’s spell” and “full of demons” (ONF 102). Under the pressure of the accusation, Melanie

soon repents of the relationship she has established with Jeanette, whereas the latter disputes the Pastor's interpretation by resorting to her ample knowledge of the Bible: "[t]o the pure all things are pure," I yelled at him. "It's you not us" (ONF 103).² The implication of Jeanette's brave reference to St. Paul is to condemn the congregation, not herself and Melanie, of 'sin', for, in her view, it is only due to the church's corrupt conception of the world that the deviant overtones of the two girls' relationship can ever be envisaged.

Contradicting the church's views, both in language and in action, has repercussions for Jeanette, who is subject to a kind of exorcism by the elders. They pray over her for the whole day, an action which does have the expected effect, for Jeanette refuses to renounce Melanie. Thus, the congregation decide to take up a harder line of action, and lock Jeanette in the parlour with no food for thirty-six hours. Over these thirty-six hours, Jeanette has an interesting dialogical interaction with the orange demon, an expression of her lesbian desire, which allows her to accept this necessary aspect of herself: "[i]f I keep you [the orange demon], what will happen?" "You'll have a difficult, different time." "Is it worth it?" "That's up to you." (ONF 107). When she is finally allowed to come out of the parlour, she has decided to take the easiest way out for her, pretending that the exorcism has been successful and that she has, in effect, repented.

When Jeanette's mother makes the most of her spell of glandular fever by ransacking her room and burning all evidence that her daughter ever had a relationship with another woman, the devastating effects of her behaviour are analysed by Jeanette, who now feels the full impact of this betrayal, and no possibility that the relationship with her mother will ever be amended: "[t]here are

different sorts of treachery, but betrayal is betrayal wherever you find it” (ONF 110).

Throughout the chapter, entitled “Joshua”, Jeanette aligns herself to this Biblical figure, a successor to Moses, who had a relevant part in the Battle of Jericho. According to the Bible, the faith that Joshua displays in God, allows him to accept God’s command to walk around the walls of the city, blowing a trumpet. This action makes the city walls fall and so the virtuous and the devout finally become victorious (Simpson 2001: 40). Jeanette’s profound belief in God, allows her to make a parallelism between herself and the Biblical figure: “[t]hat walls should fall is a consequence of blowing your own trumpet” (ONF 110). In other words, her belief that her love for Melanie is right —blowing her own trumpet— will provide her with the victory of toppling over the walls which the community construct around her and between herself and Melanie. Jeanette, therefore, passionately believes that, like Joshua, she is acting according to God’s command, by which her actions are pure —hence her earlier reference to the words of St. Paul. However, she is clever enough to hide her relationship with the newly-converted Katy from the community.

Jeanette’s lesbian desire will, once more, be publicly exposed and condemned. When she and Katy are discovered in bed together at the Morecambe guest house for the bereaved, Jeanette decides to incriminate herself, thus protecting Katy. Upon learning the news that Jeanette has not made amends for her behaviour, her mother asks her to move out of the house but not before she “smashed every plate in the kitchenette” (ONF 128). This display of violent behaviour, however, does not change Jeanette’s conviction that “[i]t all seemed to

revolve around the fact that I loved the wrong sort of people. Right sort of people in every respect except this one; romantic love for another woman was a sin” (ONF 125), thus exposing the ways in which she has fully accepted her identity as a lesbian and her denial to understand her sexuality as something inherently wrong. In an attempt to find a solid explanation for Jeanette’s tendency to “[love] the wrong sort of people” (ONF 125), the pastor appeals for an official elucidation from the church council, who resolve that the main ‘problem’ about Jeanette is that she has been “aping men” (ONF 125); that is to say, that she has appropriated a role within the community which should initially be reserved exclusively for its male members: that of a preacher. The shocking —and extremely sexist— revelation is all the more confusing to Jeanette when she witnesses how her mother accepts this account without any demurral, especially considering how Louie has been displaying a ‘masculinist’ behaviour within the community herself, in her dual tendency towards ambition and surveillance.

In the final chapter of the novel, “Ruth”, the reader learns about Jeanette’s new life, after her departure from the home and the community has effectively taken place. With her new life, a completely new subjectivity is forged by Jeanette, as she demonstrates through her thoughts when someone asks her when the last time she saw her mother was. “I didn’t want to tell her;” Jeanette says, “I thought in this city, a past was precisely that. Past. Why do I have to remember? In the old world, anyone could be *a new creation*, the past was washed away. Why should the new world be so inquisitive?” (ONF 155, my italics). It is not so much the intervention of the past which troubles Jeanette so but, rather, the feeling of not being able to detach herself from it, remaining in a no-man’s-land

where the possibility of progress is not possible. As she says: “[i]t is not one thing nor the other that leads to madness, but the space between them” (ONF 158).

Jeanette’s final departure for the city, where she goes “to escape” (ONF 157), is expressed exclusively through the inset fantastic narrative of Winnet and the sorcerer, which explores the idea of the thread that pulls individuals to their home, and the nostalgia that this pull involves: “[t]here are threads that help you find your way back, and there are threads that intend to bring you back” (ONF 155). Pulled by the thread, Jeanette does go back home for Christmas, in a return which is psychologically disturbing in so far as it makes her realise that it is as if she had never gone away:

My mother was treating me like she always had; had she noticed my absence? Did she even remember why I’d left? I have a theory that every time you make an important choice, the part of you left behind continues the other life you could have had. [...] There’s a chance that I’m not here at all, that *all parts of me*, running along all the choices I did and didn’t make, for a moment brush against each other. That I am still an evangelist in the North, as well as the person who ran away. *Perhaps for a while these two selves have become confused*. I have not gone forward or back in time, but across in time, to something I might have been, playing itself out. (ONF 164, my italics)

These words contain an interesting revelation on the part of Jeanette: she fully acknowledges the multiplicity of subject positions that telling her life story has finally allowed her to enjoy. If, when she refused to answer the stranger’s question about the last time she met her mother, she referred to herself as a “new

creation” (ONF 155), already hinting at this multiplicity of identity, here she accepts the consequences of her belief in a subjectivity which is by no means coherent, solid, or even terminated. The initial shock of realising that her return is not as distressing for her mother as it is for herself, evidenced in the older woman’s attitude to her as if she had never left, effectively allows her to pronounce her theory that “every time you make an important choice, the part of you left behind continues the other life you could have had” (ONF 164). According to this personal conjecture, there is the possibility that “all parts of [her]” (ONF 164) might meet for a moment, or become confused. This notion allows Jeanette to hypothesise about the nature of time, about the ways in which the subject might not have “gone forward or back in time” (ONF 164) in linear, historical progression, but “across in time” (ONF 164) in a synergy which allows her to experience “something I might have been, playing itself out” (ONF 164). In her articulation of desire, and her choice to experience this desire and accept it, Jeanette has effectively metamorphosed into the subject she now experiences herself to be, perceiving, in turn, that the mere possibility of occupying this subject position caters, reciprocally, for the likelihood that other subject positions were also feasible. Thus she expresses the multiplicity inherent to the subject she has become, and the subjects she will become, in an endless progression of shifting subject positions.

Her discovery of such a progression is directly related to the need of experiencing her desire to the full, to find “the company of someone utterly loyal” (ONF 165) in a relationship she compares to the one she still has with God, whom

she misses, and whom she does not think of as her betrayer (ONF 165). Her search for love and affection is related to her experience of God and her identity:

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. 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 tablets of stone.

(ONF 165)

Her need to recover “romantic love” in its “original” form (ONF 165) allows the reader to realise how far Jeanette has moved in her progression to accept her (lesbian) desire as a legitimate force in her subjectivity. For Jeanette, romantic love and affection for another woman shares in the quality of that primordial love which the Bible speaks of, that which is “written on tablets of stone” (ONF 165). Hence, she dismantles the pervasive view of the church by which her desire is related to the unnatural passions and advocates, rather, for an account of her sexuality and her identity as a lesbian as detached from sin and on a par with the original, pure feeling of love. Near the end of her story, Jeanette acknowledges how “I seemed to have run in a great circle, and met myself again on the starting line” (ONF 168). What she does not openly acknowledge, but which the reader perceives, is that this “self” that she meets again “on the starting line”, after running “in a great circle” (ONF 168) is a self who has been forever metamorphosed by the articulation and acceptance of a desire which constitutes a fundamental part of it.

5.2 Jeanette in Fantasy

All things fall and are built again
 And those that build them again are gay —W.B. Yeats, “Lapis Lazuli”, *Last Poems*, ll. 8-9

The first time Jeanette quotes the above lines from Yeats’s “Lapis Lazuli”, she relates them to her indefatigable attempts at building an orange peel igloo, her “feat of balance and wisdom” (ONF 30). What she does not seem to envisage at this stage of the novel, however, is that they constitute an interesting summary of her progress as an individual. Everything in Jeanette’s world will fall apart, but she will built it again. The re-building process will be a source of pleasure; indeed, she will be gay.³ In her re-construction of the world around her, she will make use of her peculiar fantasised versions of the universe in order to inscribe her subject positions in the text, to construct versions of herself within a dislocated context where it will be possible for her to “[gain] a secure understanding of what the meaning of [her] life ought to be” (Bettelheim 1991 [1975]: 3), whilst learning about her “inner problems ... not through abstract ethical concepts but through that which seems ... meaningful” to her (Bettelheim 1991 [1975]: 5).

In her (per)versions of reality through the fairy-tale mode, Jeanette constructs alternative versions of herself which allow her to verbalise feelings and make choices which will ultimately allow her to understand and accept both her situation and her subjectivity. In the first fairy tale, which mimics the biblical style found in the Old Testament story of “Genesis”, she assesses the reasons behind her mother’s decision to adopt her as a child: “[a]nd so it was that on a particular day, some time later, she followed a star until it came to settle above an

orphanage, and in that place was a crib, and in that crib, a child. A child with too much hair” (ONF 10). Here, Jeanette parallels herself to the newly-born child, the baby Jesus to whom the Three Wise Men paid tribute soon after his birth, according to the bible story. This parallelism is hinted at also by the title for the chapter itself; “Genesis” retells the beginning of her life as far back as she can remember. A few lines later, however, this apparently clear-cut identification becomes redefined, and Jeanette is described as springing from the head of her mother, in an allusion which now would literally equate her to the virgin goddess Athena, who sprang fully-grown and fully-armoured from the head of her father, the god Zeus. Hence, a number of narratological layers can be seen at work in this early extract from the novel, each pointing to a number of identifications for the protagonist who, in turn, has already been introduced as a ‘realistic’ character through the realistic narrative mode: Jeanette, therefore, is identified as Jesus, as the goddess Athena, but also as her ‘real’ self, Jeanette.

These narratological layers are pursued later on, in the chapter entitled “Exodus”, where the girl is equated to the children of Israel who left Egypt, the land of bondage, in search of the Promised Land. The shelter that home represents, to some degree, is also left by Jeanette, who embarks on her own particular exodus towards the world at large, represented by the unknown arena of school. The parallelisms in this chapter do not end here. To a certain extent, Jeanette is also equated, in the eyes of her mother, to Jane Eyre, whose fate, according to the older woman, she has to follow. The irony involved in this parallelism comes from the fact that Jeanette’s role model is not the original Jane Eyre which Charlotte Brontë envisaged in her novel, but the mother’s ‘holy’

rewriting of it, as has been argued in previous sections of this study. Hence, Jeanette's fate, according to her mother, would involve her marrying a missionary and dedicating herself to a life of sanctity, as in the mother's own version of *Jane Eyre*.

Through the fairy tale on perfection, which tells the story of the prince who looked for the perfect wife, Jeanette constructs a universe where it is possible for her to question the multiple authorities which rule her life. In the wise woman's denial to accept that perfection equals flawlessness and her clever disquisition that perfection is rather related to balance and harmony, Jeanette is effectively constructing an alternative worldview to her mother's rigid structures. The figure of the wise woman who disagrees with the prince is, to a certain extent, constructed as a cautionary figure for Jeanette, who fully understands that she cannot contradict her mother and the church in public. Hence, the woman in the fairy tale becomes not so much a version of Jeanette in her actions, as she does not really dare to publicly denounce the church's beliefs, but rather a desire as to what she would like to do and a clear projection of what she believes on a realistic plane. At the same time, the bold woman in the tale allows Jeanette to express her worldview, one in which human flaws are accepted. This entitles her to describe her own mother as imperfect in so far as, although the older woman is indeed perfect in the eyes of the church, she is far from balanced in her attitudes. Thus, in a world constructed exclusively by the imagination of the child, all characters — the mother included— can be rendered in a multiplicity of liberating ways.

The multiplicity of identifications is pursued to further lengths in the next chapter, "Numbers". In the Old Testament, the original chapter introduces Moses

as a prophet who speaks directly to God. In a way, this is a figure with whom Jeanette may be identified, in so far as her view of the Christian doctrine comes from her extensive reading and knowledge of the Bible and, as such, it is unmediated by the principles of the Evangelist church in a number of aspects. As Jeanette has already argued through her fairy tale on perfection, she has more than one “theological disagreement” (ONF 58) with the rigid interpretation of the Scriptures that the church offers. The identification of the girl with the prophet Moses anticipates her final break with the church, a break which does not involve abandoning God: “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” (ONF 165).

As the title for the next chapter, “Joshua”, anticipates, Jeanette is effectively identified with Joshua, the successor to Moses, who blew his trumpet according to God’s command and made the walls of the city collapse during the battle of Jericho. This equation, however, is coloured by Jeanette’s equally important aligning with the figure of Humpty Dumpty, the nursery-rhyme character who traditionally appears perched on a wall and is about to fall, thereby occupying a frontier position between outside and inside, and which, for Jeanette, is an emblem of her own ambiguous position. Through this multiplicity of identifications, Jeanette is, at one and the same time, the agent responsible for the collapse of the boundaries —she is Joshua, who made the walls fall— but also the presumed victim of such a collapse —Humpty Dumpty, who is never put together again. This twofold textual projection of her subjectivity encapsulates her predicament in a particularly forceful manner.

Literary identifications persist in the next chapter, "Judges", where Jeanette finds a parallel figure in Sir Perceval, the hero of romance who has to leave behind the comfort of his home, Camelot, and the love of King Arthur in order to pursue his quest for the Holy Grail. The parallelisms between the protagonist and her heroic counterpart are explored in the realistic narrative through the question that a stranger asks Jeanette: "[w]hen did you last see your mother?" (ONF 156). In Malory's version of the tale of the Holy Grail, Sir Perceval is asked a similar question by his aunt, who proceeds to tell him of the death of his mother as a consequence of losing her son (Simpson 2001: 49). This apparently harmless question has the power not only to upset Jeanette to a certain extent, but it pertinently triggers one of her many interesting reflections on the possibilities of multiple identities: "[t]here's a chance that I'm not here at all, that all the parts of me, running along all the choices I did and didn't make, for a moment brush against each other" (ONF 164).

Finally, the possibilities of a multiplicity of identity counterparts and the liberating experience extracted from occupying an amalgam of different subject positions are explored to their ultimate consequences in the concluding chapter for the novel, "Ruth". In this chapter, as Tess Cosslet argues, "a kind of composite character emerges ...: Jeanette/Winnet/Ruth/Perceval/Jane, all united in exile and questing" (Cosslet 1998: 24). Thus Jeanette effectively becomes a multi-faceted character through her identification with the exiled biblical figure of Ruth,⁴ whilst the parallelisms with the figure of Sir Perceval, who allows her to explore the pain and uncertainty of leaving behind what is known, continue. A further identificatory element is introduced through the tale of Winnet Stonejar and the

sorcerer, in which Jeanette and Winnet share a common fate. At first attracted by the magic pull of the sorcerer, Winnet learns his magic knowledge until the day comes in which she thinks of him as her biological father, although he is not so. Like Jeanette, Winnet is asked by her tutor to abandon her home and has expectations that a new, better, more fulfilling life will begin far away in a distant and unknown city.

Through the act of storytelling and fabulation, Jeanette is able to “construct for herself a series of shifting, fluid selves” which go against the notions of “a single, static identity” (Palmer 1993: 101). Subjectivity for Jeanette, therefore, has a lot to do with narrativity, with the textualisation of the self, and the inscription of subject positions in the textual body. Her identifications with such figures as Sir Percival and Winnet, for example, allow Jeanette to explore aspects of separation from home, which include the metaphorical disintegration of the self when this self is cut from the psychological idea of comfort that home exerts on it. The story of Winnet, on the other hand, places emphasis on the irrational bond that ties mother and daughter, a magic pull which cannot be explained by the more rational aspects of the self. A further aspect of these fairy tales is explored by Paulina Palmer. This critic argues that the fairy tales Jeanette invents repeatedly subvert gender conventions, probably because “in the mind, ... our desires, anxieties and fears are acted out by a myriad different figures both male and female” (1993: 102). Fairy tales and fables thus become the perfect scenario where Jeanette can textualise her shifting, at times contradictory, always enriching identities, whilst relating these contradictions to an effective undermining of the authority of the Old Testament “by placing biblical motifs in

new and incongruous contexts,” contexts which, at times, may be deemed “comically inappropriate” (Palmer 1993: 102, 103). In Jeanette’s fantasised version of reality, everything around her acquires a potentiality for transformation into a story, and everyone, including herself, can become a character in that story. The concept of reality itself collapses but, paradoxically, it is all the more effectively conveyed.

The outcome of Jeanette’s understanding of reality as a consistent multiplicity of narratological layers is that it offers a view of the character within the story as likewise multiple. The above reading, which has focused on her multifaceted identifications with several biblical, literary, and invented figures supports this idea of a fascination for a subject which is likewise multiple, ambiguous and in constant transformation: “‘You’ll never marry,’ the gypsy said to young Jeanette, ‘not you, and you’ll never be still’” (ONF 7). Her premonition turns true, Jeanette is always on the move, a subject in constant process and progress who refuses to exercise on herself what Judith Butler has termed “a totalization of [the] ‘I’”: “[t]o claim that this is what I *am* is to suggest a provisional totalization of this ‘I’. But if the I can so determine itself, then that which it excludes in order to make that determination remains constitutive of the determination itself” (in Fuss 1991: 15). By refusing to offer her ‘I’ within a totalising position, Jeanette effectively explores all the aspects of her self which a ‘determination of the subject’ in the Butlerian sense would negate, thus embracing an ambiguity which is helpful in the process of constructing her subjectivity. In the operation, she becomes decentered, but the point is that the decentered self is still an agent subject, one that not only allows, but celebrates the rift caused by the multiplicity

of positions that she allows herself to occupy in the textualisation of her subjectivity.

Previous sections of this study have focused on the presumed deconstruction of the concept of ‘autobiography’ that Jeanette Winterson’s text offers, mainly through the subtle alteration of the principal tenets of this genre, which bases itself on the presumption that what is understood by ‘reality’ or ‘truth’ can be clearly dichotomised from what is understood by ‘fantasy’ or ‘fiction’. My argument then was that no clear-cut generic definition can be successfully applied to a text which is elusive of definitions and escapes completion, even in its open-endedness. The fact that *Oranges* constitutes a first-person narrative exercise has been tackled in relation to this argument. The next section of this study, which will offer some tentative conclusions to my reading of *Oranges*, will focus on another aspect of the first-person narration which is intricately related to the notion of a subjectivity in process which has been put forward here: the issue of agency.

Notes

¹ Although I make the gender distinction ‘he/she’ for the sake of coherence with the rest of this study, the protagonist of the traditional *Bildungsroman* is usually male. One of the most popular novels within this genre would be Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations* which traces the story of young Pip, the blacksmith’s boy who aspires to the status of gentleman. Susan A. Lichtman’s study *The Female Hero in Women’s Literature and Poetry* (1996) demonstrates how the development of what she calls ‘female hero’ in literature is marked by dynamics different from that of the male hero. For full publication details of this text, see the **Works Cited** section of the present study.

² Jeanette is here misquoting St. Paul’s epistle to Titus (1: 15), which reads: “Unto the pure all things are pure; but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled” (Simpson 2001: 39).

³ It is highly doubtful that the pun in the word “gay” escaped the author when she chose these particular lines from Yeats’s poem. Winterson appropriates Yeats’s use of the term “gay” for her own gender-transgressing ends.

⁴ As Simpson notes, Ruth also undergoes voluntary exile from her own family, from her religion and from her country, to finally go back to her mother-in-law, Naomi (2001: 61).

6. Multiple Agents: Tentative Conclusion(s) on *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*

Write your self —Hélène Cixous & Catherine Clément, *The Newly-Born Woman*, 250

It is not a question of knowing whether I speak of myself in a way that conforms to what I am, but rather of knowing whether I am the same as that of which I speak —Jaques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, 165

I am conscious of the world as consisting of multiple realities. As I move from one reality to another, I experience the transition as a kind of shock —Peter L. Berger & Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 45

Fluidity of character is not merely a prerogative of the protagonists of some novels. Jeanette Winterson seems to be well aware of this, as she demonstrates when she widens the possibilities of multiple identifications to reach not only Jeanette, the protagonist of her novel *Oranges*, but also the characters around her. A poststructuralist understanding of subjectivity as a phenomenon related to fluidity, multiplicity and desire is strongly felt throughout the novel, and most of the characters involved in Jeanette's tale of becoming display it to a greater or lesser degree. The aim of the present chapter is twofold: on the one hand, it will explore the way in which multiplicity impregnates another relevant

character in the narrative, that of Louie, Jeanette's mother, as a paradigm and example that multiplicity cannot be escaped within the postmodern diegesis; on the other, it will debate the way in which Jeanette Winterson's understanding of multiplicity has implications for the narrative voice she chooses for her novel, thereby offering a proposal of what I have termed 'multiplicity of agency'.

6.1 Multiplicity of (maternal) subjectivity

As has been previously argued, the character which has a more distinct personality within *Oranges*, apart from Jeanette, is her own mother, Louie. Jeanette's mother has an important impact in the young girl's construction of subjectivity in so far as she is the agent responsible for most of the early information that she has access to. It will be against this information and the worldview constructed from it, together with the means through which it was acquired, that she will also construct her own, mostly contrastive but not necessarily excluding, worldview.

Although she is always at pains to present herself as a woman of rigid beliefs which, apparently, confer on her a solid and coherent personality almost impossible to put at risk, Louie is identified, within Jeanette's fantastic rendering of reality, with a vast number of counterparts. These function as somewhat hidden or repressed parts of the older woman's subjectivity which the girl has to experience, at times endure, but which the mother may not be aware of, thus making manifest that subjectivity is formed in a relational manner; that is to say, the subject itself has little or no control over the image(s) she projects upon others and, therefore, of the construction of this/these image(s) by those around her.

Hence, Louie is equated with the Three Wise Men when the story of Jeanette's adoption is told in "Genesis". The biblical identification, however, is twofold at this early stage of the novel. Louie's competition with the Virgin Mary, who "got there first" as far as the begetting of children in the absence of sexual intercourse is concerned, aligns her with this holy figure as well. This early and quite benevolent (per)version of the mother is undermined by the way in which she is perceived to share more than one characteristic with the totalitarian prince in the fairy tale which debates perfection and flawlessness. The narratological game which Jeanette sets out in this particular fable establishes references which go beyond the fable itself in so far as the punishment that the wise woman undergoes after contradicting the prince in public —beheading— is later on referred to through an allusion to the words uttered by the malevolent Queen in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The mother and the malicious Queen are offered as parallels in their sadism and cruelty: "*Now I give you fair warning*" *shouted the Queen, stamping on the ground as she spoke; 'Either you or your head must be off'*" (ONF 125, italics in original). Here is the way in which Jeanette tells her readers that her mother turns her out of the maternal home, no further explanation is deemed necessary at this stage. The correspondence between the mother and the Queen reaffirms the early equivalence between the mother and the prince in the fairy tale, especially in their taste for punishment of the same brutal variety: "*either you or your head must be off*" (ONF 125, italics in original). The fairy tale, as has been previously argued, concludes with a reference to Frankenstein, by which it could be argued that Jeanette's playful imaginary is here linking her mother with Doctor Frankenstein and the outcome of his usurpation of

a place which was not initially designed for him, that of the begetter of life. Likewise, the mother's frankensteinish attitude towards Jeanette is worth mentioning here. Louie, like Frankenstein, manipulates a somewhat innocent creature, Jeanette, in order to transform it/her into what she believes to be a perfect being, hence her constant reminders to Jeanette that her fate, becoming a missionary, was settled early.

The multiplicity of maternal identifications becomes more intricate as the novel wears on. Thus, the mother is identified with King Arthur in the narratives which tell the story of Sir Perceval, and with the manipulative sorcerer in the Winnet Stonejar tale. These classifications suggest the point argued by Paulina Palmer quoted in the previous chapter of this study, by which gender conventions within Jeanette's fables are effectively upset. That Jeanette's mother displays 'masculinist' traits is a feature that the narrative is at constant pains to demonstrate. Her understanding of power and authority, as has been argued before, is blatantly and graphically explored by Jeanette's story, through her descriptions of her mother from the early recollections of her life —her prohibition that she should buy her comic from the lesbian couple who run the paper shop— to the crisis of adolescence —her active and resolute participation in Jeanette's exorcism, together with the burning of any evidence of Jeanette's lesbian relationship with Melanie— to the final stages of separation —her turning Jeanette out of the house, claiming that "the Devil looks after his own" (ONF 134).¹

Aligning the mother with these two overtly patriarchal figures —at least within Jeanette's textualisation of them— could, however, also be rendered as a

small narrative revenge on the part of Jeanette. The young girl's shock at witnessing her mother's hypocrisy when she gladly accepts the church's petty explanation for her lesbian desire—the fact that she has been, they say, “aping men”, and thus performing an overtly masculine role in her predominant position as a preacher—is textualised at the level of fantasy. Jeanette is, indeed, astonished at her mother's compliant acceptance of such a sexist justification precisely because Louie herself has been displaying an obvious unholy ambition and thirst for power within the hierarchical structure that the Evangelical community represents.² By identifying the mother, at an unconscious level, with two patriarchal figures, those of King Arthur and Winnet's sorcerer, Jeanette is making her point about the mother's personality and the impact it has on her all the more obvious.

Louie's attempts at displaying a coherent, unproblematised identity, therefore, are continuously undermined and put at risk by Jeanette's transformation of her mother into a character within a diegesis created by her fantasy exercises. As such, Louie's presumed coherent subjectivity is prone to the (subversive) literary manipulations which the narratorial voice exerts on her.

6.2 Multiplicity of Agency

The intricate network of references and identifications which Jeanette proposes through her (per)versions of reality through fable and fairy tale extends beyond the characters which she, as a narrator, introduces on the realistic narrative plane, her mother being one example. By drawing somewhat obvious analogies between the orange demon which she hallucinates and the raven Abdenego within

the *Winnet* narrative, Jeanette proves that multiplicity is not a prerogative of those characters modelled through a more realistic prism. The same point could be made about the way in which certain motifs are re-deployed. The recurrent “rough brown pebble” and the “invisible thread” appear in the realistic narrative, but they can also be seen at work in the *Winnet* and the *Sir Perceval* narratives with unaltered metaphorical meaning.

One of the novel’s tentative conclusive points through the deployment of this cross-pollination of references, therefore, would be to argue for the multi-layered nature of any narrative, which is proposed not in an ordered, progressive, historical way, but in a synergetic manner. References and motifs come and go, irrespective of their place in presumed historical, linear context. The effect that the reader experiences is verbalised in the message that the narrative voice puts forward in the chapter “Deuteronomy”. The possibilities of the multiplicity of reality are made evident and, although trying to represent these realities as a coherent whole is a futile enterprise, the most satisfactory approximation to this representation will only be that which is effected through the use of stories, as multiple and diverse as imagination will allow for.

The title of the novel casts further light on this issue. It could be argued that this is a novel structured like an orange, in so far as the reader can find many parts which, put together, make a complete whole. The fact that the signification of the orange as a motif is not closed, but open to a multiplicity of interpretations, introduces refreshing possibilities for the likewise multiple interpretation of a reality structured like an orange. Moreover, as the title wisely warns, “oranges are not the only fruit”; that is to say, there are infinite ‘realities’ to be discovered, to

be textualised, to be narrated. In this respect, it would be interesting to go back, once more, to the “Deuteronomy” chapter, where these ideas are playfully theorised and which introduces a further, stimulating multiplicity within Jeanette’s tale: the multiplicity of agency.

The fact that Jeanette’s story is told by Jeanette herself through a first-person narrative voice, should not go unnoticed, just as its powerful effect within the narrative should not be dismissed. The tone and expressions of the narrative voice, the wit and sense of humour, even the use of irony become more sophisticated as the novel unfolds and as its main character becomes more mature, both as a character within the narrative and as the author of her own tale. The inclusion of “Deuteronomy” right in the middle of the novel is effective in so far as it demonstrates the crucial importance which its message has in Jeanette’s tale of becoming. Nevertheless, this placing of the chapter at a moment in which Jeanette has not achieved full maturity as a character may also be somewhat perplexing for the readers in so far as, on a first reading of the novel, they are unable to recognise the voice who is effectively and suddenly talking to them with such seeming congruity. Towards narrative closure, however, the wheel suddenly comes full circle and the reader is made to remember the voice who spoke so forcefully in “Deuteronomy” as the voice of adult Jeanette. This identification is not only based on the similarities in the tone employed, which is clearly that of the main character’s reflections in the last pages of the novel, but on the recurrence of the same words and expressions. “Time is a great deadener. People forget, get bored, grow old, go away,” this is how the unnamed narrator in “Deuteronomy” begins her chapter (ONF 91). Later on, upon meeting Melanie and realising that in

her mind she has effectively turned her relationship with Jeanette into a silly, childish game, Jeanette resorts to the same words: “[t]ime is a great deadener; people forget, get bored, grow old, go away” (ONF 166). Where the narrator of “Deuteronomy” advised that history was just “a string full of knots” and “[t]he best you can do is admire the cat’s cradle, and maybe knot it up a bit more” (ONF 91), Jeanette now counteracts Melanie’s assertion that not much had happened between them, “historically speaking” (ONF 166), by saying that: “[b]ut history is a string full of knots, the best you can do is admire it, and maybe knot it up a bit more. History is a hammock for swinging and a game for playing. A cat’s cradle” (ONF 166). Hence, the lesson issuing from the crucial chapter placed right in the middle of the novel has not only been learned, but successfully internalised. The main tenets of “Deuteronomy”, which point to the desirability that a multiple interpretation of stories be produced and accepted against a monolithic idea of “History [sic]” (ONF 91) can be linked to the main ideology of the narrative voice, Jeanette’s, and to the temporary conclusion she is reaching here, after having told her story and, therefore, textualising her subjectivity: that multiplicity of meanings may be upheld against the reductive nature of pure facts. This multiplicity is felt not just at the level of characterisation, but also at the level of agency.

“I seemed to have run in a great circle, and met myself again on the starting line” (ONF 168). The sudden meeting of Jeanette and Jeanette “on the starting line” (ONF 168) caters for an understanding of subjectivity which is multiple in so far as its inscription on the textual body has had the power to render it so. This is the way in which Jacques Lacan would explain this phenomenon:

I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object. What is realised in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming. (1977: 86)

Jeanette, within her own Lacanian theoretical scenario, identifies herself in language to lose herself in it like an object; that is, to become a character within her own story. In her history, she realises not the “past definite” of what she was, not the “present perfect” of what she has been, but the “future anterior” of what she shall have been in the continuous “process of becoming” (Lacan 1977: 86). The novel’s open-endedness promises a future for Jeanette, even when the magical thread that unites her to her mother has not been completely cut. Hence, she is still a subject in the process of becoming; she will never “be still”, just as the gypsy had predicted (ONF 7). As such, Jeanette is a subject of desire by definition, for she is “constantly launching [herself] into the field of other where [she] seeks to know what [she] might have become” (Bristow 1997: 89), always in a process of deferred, yet liberating, becoming.

The subject Winterson proposes in her novel is never still, it is always desiring to move forward, constantly desiring to become a new version of her self. Hence, a vast spectrum of subject positions has been at hand for Jeanette throughout the novel: a working-class girl living in a northern town, the member of an Evangelical community, a lesbian in a hostile environment, a wise woman whose head was cut off by censorship, Sir Perceval, Winnet Stonejar, Jesus, Athena, Moses, Ruth, others. To these may be added all the subject positions

which she may have occupied had she stayed at home and accepted her mother's worldview. Further, to these may be added the narrator of her own story, the agent responsible for textualising her subjectivity in an on-going quest which escapes narrative closure.

My conclusions to *Oranges* are, like the text itself, open-ended. If, as the narrator advises from the pages of the novel, "the quest is all" (ONF 154), the only epilogue to be reached from the reading of an open-ended tale is that the quest, like all quests, may continue beyond the presumed limits of the story, temporarily encapsulated by its covers. The undecidability of the text, its refusal to offer a sense of closure, sustains the idea not only that Jeanette's quest towards new temporary subject positions may continue under the ongoing spell of desire, but that, ultimately, it has also been desire which has governed the reader's interest in her tale.

Notes

¹ I did not use the expression “masculine behaviour” in so far as I do not wish to claim that such cruel and violent attitudes are an exclusive prerogative of men. However, I use what to my mind is the more appropriate locution “masculinist behaviour” in so far as a patriarchal and essentially misled understanding of masculinity is that which coerces it to display such attitudes. I would also like to note here that the example of Jeanette’s mother is evidence enough that such a behaviour is not ‘masculine’, but ‘masculinist’, hence the fact that a woman may display it with equal ease.

² The point should be made here that there have repeatedly been times in the narrative in which Louie has neglected her motherly duties in order to carry out her ecclesiastical responsibilities. A flagrant case in point would be the time in which Jeanette is left alone in hospital, as her mother is busy with chores for the church.

V. “A project that defies completion”: Desire, Fantasy and Personal Utopia

“Desire in Western culture is inextricably intertwined with narrative, just as the tradition of Western fiction is threaded through with desire” —Catherine Belsey, *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture*, ix

“... one object of desire [...] is identity itself” —Catherine Belsey, *Poststructuralism: A Very Short Introduction*, 64

“Si també tinguéssim una Fantàstica, tal com tenim una Lògica, s’hauria descobert l’art d’inventar” —Novalis, *Fragments*, 13

“Writing about desire [is] a project that defies completion” —Catherine Belsey, *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture*, 3

“... la literatura no tiene que ver con las respuestas, sino con las preguntas. Un buen escritor no es el que intenta iluminar a la humanidad, respondiendo a las grandes cuestiones universales que angustian a sus congéneres, sino el que se hace preguntas a sí mismo y las traslada en sus libros al lector, para compartir con él quizás no lo mejor, pero sí lo más esencial que posee. Desde este punto de vista, las certezas son mucho menos valiosas que las dudas, y las contradicciones representan más un estímulo que una dificultad” —Almudena Grandes, “Prólogo: Quince años después”, *Las edades de Lulú*, 23

Throughout this study, I have attempted to produce a discourse in which subjectivity, desire and narrative were integrated and interrogated. Through my readings of Angela Carter’s *Heroes and Villains* and Jeanette Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, I have set out to reflect on the ways in which the subject’s desire produces an alternative location where a narrative of the self as a

multiple phenomenon may be effected. My conclusions to those readings were by no means closed, for it is my belief that if stories, in their relation to desire, are open-ended, any reading of these stories should participate in the elusive nature that is an integral part of all stories. The general conclusions to my study, therefore, will be as tentative as those I reached after my readings of the fictional texts, with a view to rendering this study an open-ended quality.

Here, I would like to reach some tentative conclusions as to the relationship that narrative possesses with regard to desire and subjectivity, assessing the importance of fantasy and imagination as organising principles, not only of the texts I have discussed, but also of the construction of the desiring subject in process.

My point of departure has been an understanding of subjectivity in poststructuralist terms. I have adhered to a proposal of subjectivity as constructed within language, rather than reflected by it. A far cry from the Cartesian, unified, coherent, and rational subject, the subject of poststructuralism is a stranger to itself, produced within discursive practices and, as such, multiple, *discoherent*, and constantly in process.

Within this proposal, the major role played by desire in the construction of subjectivity has also been assessed. Desire, a phenomenon which “eludes final definition” and is “unable to name itself” (Belsey 1994: 3, 75), but the omnipresence of which is universally felt, is recognised by psychoanalysis as the central presence/absence around which subjectivity is shaped. The seduction of the Other (of desire) prompts the subject to mutate, to be generative of another,

thus laying bare its inherent multiplicity and incoherence. The subject who desires, therefore, is a subject in process.

As I have argued, all these mechanisms are reflected at their best in narrative fiction, which functions as a kind of Lacanian mirror, a specular space where seduction is constantly at play. Through “the mutual exchange between readers’ and writers’ fantasy,” —in itself, a form of seduction— which allows the text to “bring impossible things into existence” (Warner 2004 [2002]: 169), the subject finds in narrative fiction a utopian space where desire can be explored and articulated in so far as “[a] story is always a question of desire” (Lauretis 1984: 112). Both desire and stories are ruled by the same dynamics of elusiveness, even when desire “presses to be written, to be narrated” (Belsey 1994: ix).

The two cases I have proposed as examples of the above, Marianne and Jeanette, are highly contrastive, but they have one point in common: the two protagonists become agents in their narrative when they actively conceive of an alternative locus where the subjects in process that they constitute can be fully explored and expressed. This alternative, utopian location is created through the use of fantasy and imagination.

In *Heroes and Villains*, Angela Carter creates a post-nuclear, dichotomised universe where the only possibilities to hand are the civilisation of the Professors and the Barbarian settlement. Between these strict binaries, the construction of an individual identity is a hard task, for “[l]osing their names ... things underwent a process of uncreation and reverted to chaos” (HV 136). Within the over-rationalised, over-disciplinary context of Professor society which, on the surface, looks “*like a place where everyone was happy*” (HV 4, my italics), desire has no

settled place, as a consequence of which the protagonist of the story, young Professor girl, Marianne, an “odd one” (HV 67) in her own community, needs to envisage an alternative locus where her desire may be articulated. This is how she sets out to explore the exotic land of the Barbarians, which allows her to reach out to the Other that Jewel is. Being a stranger to her own desire, Marianne’s desire coherently finds personification in the figure which is the most diametrically opposed to her own.

Jewel occupies the position initially denied to everyone within psychoanalytic theory, that of the Other. Described as a Calibanesque, “ignoble savage” (HV 10), depicted following the literary tenets of the demon lover and the *homme fatal*, prefigured as a “hobgoblin of [Barbarian] nightmare” (HV 5), a hero and a villain, all these identities finally dissolve under Marianne’s scrutiny. Once his Barbarian mask falls, Jewel becomes “nothing but the furious invention of [Marianne’s] virgin nights” (HV 137). His dissolution is effective in so far as he is made to occupy the only position allowed to him: nothing but the recipient of the subject’s desire, both “an indeterminable location and the location of complete indeterminacy” (Belsey 1994: 143).

The construction of the Other, however, has repercussions on the subject herself. Laying bare the fragile distinction between self and other, as theorised by Julia Kristeva in *Strangers to Ourselves* (1989), Marianne becomes estranged — Other— both within her Professor community and within the Barbarian tribe. Several mytho-poetic roles are cast upon the young girl, mostly by the guru of the tribe, ex-Professor Donally, who equates Marianne to Shakespeare’s Miranda, to the biblical Eve, and to an extravagant version of the Virgin Mary, amongst

others. Through these identifications, Donally shows the fragile nature of Marianne’s identity as a Professor girl, once she is dislocated from her original environment. Through the Gothic marriage ceremony by means of which she becomes Jewel’s wife, Marianne becomes secularised, and a new stage as wife-of-Barbarian and future mother-of-Barbarian begins.

Little by little, however, all these subject positions imposed from outside will be rejected by the agent subject that Marianne becomes as her narrative of the self unravels. Towards the end of the novel, Marianne, now a widow, is described as feeling “surprised to find herself dislocated from and unfamiliar to her own body” (HV 148), but on her way to becoming the ruler of the roost in her self-fashioned, new subject position as the tiger lady. The novel’s refusal to offer a closure to Marianne’s story, however, allows for desire not to be satisfied and for new, multiple subject positions to be possible beyond the physical realm of the book covers.

Heroes and Villains explores how the desire to articulate desire may allow for the construction of a utopian space, where the subject positions Marianne may want to occupy can be realised. Desire opens a location of fantasy where the subject can appear and disappear, where subjectivity may be constructed and deconstructed, and where multiplicity and transformation may be not only possible, but liberating.

Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit opens with a realistic setting: young, adopted Jeanette is living in a northern, industrial town with her Pentecostal Evangelist parents. Jeanette’s childhood is thoroughly marked by the message of the Bible and the difficult and ambiguous relationship with Louie, her adoptive

mother, described by Jeanette as "enlightened and reactionary at the same time" (ONF 126). Through the intervention of her childhood friend, Elsie, the young girl is allowed to come into contact with alternative sources of knowledge through her readings of poetry, fairy tales, and fantastic literature.

Jeanette's interest in fairy tales and novels allow her to discover a view of the world dissociated from her mother's totalitarian doctrine, by which not only do alternatives to such a doctrine suddenly become feasible, but the construction of a world where "oranges are not the only fruit" is a possible enterprise. A case in point is the discovery of the 'true' ending of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. For a number of years, Louie had been telling Jeanette a (per)version of Brontë's novel, in which Jane Eyre did not go back to blinded Mr Rochester, but dedicated herself to the missionary life by marrying St John Rivers. The discovery that Brontë's narrative does not have such a holy *dénouement* is a turning point in Jeanette's own narrative in so far as she equates this devastating discovery with the moment in which she found her own adoption papers in the family drawer:

I found out, that dreadful day in a back corner of the library, that Jane doesn't marry St John at all, that she goes back to Mr Rochester. It was like the day I discovered my adoption papers while searching for a pack of playing cards. I have never since played cards, and I have never since read *Jane Eyre*. (ONF 73)

This mechanism, by which Jeanette identifies the fictional discovery with an incident from her life, launches a dynamic that will inform her tale, by which she will increasingly textualise her circumstances and her subjectivity, in an attempt

to come to terms with the more troublesome aspects of her own ‘reality’ through fantasy.

Through this dynamic, the dichotomy between ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’ is effectively dismantled. This is a game which Winterson takes beyond the novel, by having a character who not only shares her name, but lives episodes presumably lived by the author herself, in *roman-à-clef* style. Through these hypothetical (auto)biographical implications, Winterson offers a textualisation of her belief that “there’s no such thing as autobiography, there’s only art and lies” (1994: 141).

As Jeanette becomes an adolescent, the textualisation of her own life and the detachment it brings about, removing her from the grim reality that surrounds her, become increasingly important. When she discovers that her relationship with Melanie, another member of the Evangelical community, is regarded as an “Unnatural Passion” (ONF *passim*), as a consequence of which she is subjected to an exorcist rite, finding a means to articulate her desire and her subjectivity in a positive light becomes a question of survival. After Jeanette has been exorcised and locked up in the parlour for several hours with no food, a hallucination in the shape of an orange demon makes its appearance. It is no surprise that it comes with the good news that demons are not really evil, “just different, and difficult” (ONF 106).

Both a member of the community and an outcast within it, both her mother’s daughter and not her mother’s daughter, Jeanette will find escape in the creation of fantastic spaces through the use of fairy tales, romances and biblical myths through which alternative, positive versions of herself will be realised. Her

textual identification with fairy-tale characters, knights in Arthurian legends, and biblical figures will offer her the possibility of occupying a multiplicity of subject positions whilst reflecting on her situation as a lesbian within a hostile community. At the end of the novel, a multi-faceted character effectively emerges as Jeanette becomes, among others, Sir Perceval, Ruth, a self-sufficient magician in a fairy tale of her own invention, and the many different Jeanettes that she has become as in her process towards adulthood. In a final twist as regards the possibilities of multiplicity, Winterson integrates into her narrative the idea of the protean nature of reality and the possibility of living parallel lives in fearless synergy, thus providing the issue of the compound subject with endless potentiality:

I have a theory that every time you make an important choice, the part of you left behind continues the other life you could have had. [...] There's a chance that I'm not here at all, that all the parts of me, running along all the choices I did and didn't make, for a moment brush against each other. [...] I have not gone forward or back in time, but across in time, to something I might have been, playing itself out. [...] I seemed to have run in a great circle, and met myself again on the starting line. (ONF 164, 168)

Both *Heroes and Villains* and *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* propose a view of subjectivity as multiple and dis coherent; they relate the construction of subjectivity with the exploration of desire, with the constant transformation of the subject, and with the creation of a utopian, alternative space where subjectivity can be explored. I would like to conclude my study by introducing the relationship

between the concept of subjectivity and desire in relation to the creation of a utopian space of fantasy and imagination which is personal and exclusive to the subject. My argument will be that this creation is possible because subjectivity itself is a utopian concept.

Catherine Belsey argues that “desire imagines a utopian world, envisaging a transformation and transfiguration of the quotidian” (1994: 7). Desire is an escape from the subject we constitute; we desire to metamorphose, to occupy the next subject position. In the process, the subject, “already redoubled and split in its imagined, imaged specular wholeness, and divided again in its own utterances” (Belsey 1994: 198-199), appeals for the response of the Other — whether this may be a person or a mode of being— which would make it apparently unified. The fulfilment of the desire for the Other, however, is always imaginary, for the Other is unattainable; otherwise, it would cease to be the Other of desire. Belsey, however, identifies something in Western culture which is very close to the fulfilment of this desire: the desire for agency, “to *be* or to *control* the condition of the possibility of subjectivity —and in consequence of desire itself” (1994: 199, italics in original). As the effect of language within poststructuralist economics, subjectivity and desire cannot be controlled; therefore, to try and fulfil satisfaction and occupy the place of undifferentiated origin is a utopian enterprise.

In so far as utopian literature expresses wish-fulfilment, it is about desire and, as such, has “the status of dreams” (Belsey 1994: 201). When we envisage a utopia, we are envisaging an alternative where our desires may be realised whilst remaining a necessary absence: “desire is the metonym of a discontent which envisages utopia” (Belsey 1994: 209). Desire, however, is intransferable. Its

ambiguity relies on the fact that it is “the commonest and yet the most singular condition we know,” (Belsey 1994: 3), for we may share the condition of desire with a whole culture, but it remains, paradoxically, the most “intimate and personal” (Belsey 1994: 3) of experiences.

The status of desire as an intransferable, yet universal, condition is the reason which makes it an integral part in the construction of what I consider the personal utopia of subjectivity. My argument is that the only utopia which succeeds is that in which the subject creates, through the use of fantasy and imagination, an alternative world where his/her subjectivity might be explored and celebrated. For Marianne, the personal utopia takes the form of a Barbarian tribe, the opposite of her culture of provenance, which allows her to occupy a multiplicity of subject positions. For Jeanette it takes place in a world of fantasy where she can construct multiple versions of herself, which the totalitarian regime of the sect does not allow for. If desire is intransferable and personal, so is utopia, which would explain why the social, communal utopias envisaged by such authors as Plato and Thomas More, to name but two, dangerously transform into totalitarian systems. Dystopian societies, on the other hand, share many elements of organisation with so-called utopias. After all, it might be possible that one subject's utopia may well be his/her neighbour's dystopia.

Within this proposition, in the personal utopia of fantasy created by the subject's desire, the “desire to achieve presence, to attain the imaginary plenitude of perfect recognition, of full possession” (Belsey 1994: 146) may be realised. Far from prescribing, personal utopias, constructed by desire, allow for a space where options are feasible, where choices are possible, speculative as these choices may

remain. After all, “[i]s not utopian speculation precisely utopian?” Belsey asks (1994: 197).

The fact that “one object of desire [...] is identity itself” (Belsey 2002: 64), allows for an understanding of the relation between desire, subjectivity and the creation of utopian spaces. The multiple subject proposed by poststructuralism is constantly being constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed, in an endless permutation which takes it to future subject positions. The desire to metamorphose, to occupy the next subject position, can be articulated through the creation of a fantastic space which allows for the transformations of the protean nature of the subject:

What is realised in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming. (Lacan 1977: 86)

As Lacan claims in the above quote, through the narrative history of the subject, what is realised is “not the past definite of what was” or “the present perfect of what has been”, but “the future anterior of what I shall have been”, for it is in the nature of the subject to be always “in the process of becoming” (1977: 86). In the utopian space created by the desire to experience this “process of becoming” (Lacan 1977: 86), the poststructuralist subject runs counter to concepts of unity, totalisation, closure, and homogeneity in order to “never [to] be still” (ONF 7), to “mutate” (ONF 156) into all the subject positions which its desire to become may bring about, even if the result is to feel temporarily “dislocated” and “unfamiliar” (HV 148).

As subjects-in-process, we inhabit a constant, transitional utopian state of desire. Through our literary seductions, we are able to imagine an alternative location of fantasy where the multiple subject that we may be can be fully explored, where we can appear and disappear, where we can temporarily articulate the desire for the Other, where we can metamorphose in a tale of becoming, the open-endedness of which will sustain the liberating uncertainties of desire. If “all stories are inscriptions of desire” (Belsey 1994: 209), desire also transforms lives into stories, even if it remains uninscribed, elusive and excessive.

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