

**‘SELF’ AND ‘OTHER’ IN JEANETTE
WINTERSON’S *THE PASSION*¹**

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ABSTRACT

Male postmodernist fiction often shows an obsessive desire to undermine the concept of the bourgeois individual subject characteristic of classic realism. However, women writers on the whole do not feel comfortable with an aesthetics of impersonality because it would be deeply at odds with women’s own experience of subordination and objectification. The paper analyses the way in which, in *The Passion*, Jeanette Winterson attempts to reconcile her rejection of the conventions of classic realism with her need for definition of selfhood within the framework of Freudian and Lacanian theory.

Jean-François Lyotard (1984) has described the cultural panorama of the seventies and eighties as the result of a generalised loss of faith in the centralized and totalizing impulse of humanist thought which is reflected in a complex change of sensibility in the Western world, traceable, as Julia Kristeva has explained (1969), to the decade of the sixties, characterised by widespread demands for engagement and commitment, expressed, for example, in the students’ revolt of May 1968 in France and in the anti-Vietnam War and Civil Rights protests, in Black and Feminist activism and in the appearance of the New Left in the U. S. A. These popular protests, as well as the increase of interest in pacificism, in anti-militarist and “green” political options are the most evident expressions of what Fredric Jameson (1984:56) has described as a generalised reaction against the “humanist cultural dominant,” or, a reaction against what Lyotard (1984) has called the “master narratives” of bourgeois liberalism, expressing the unchallenged position of the patriarchal system and offering as an alternative the cultural perspective of the “fringe,” that is, the more fragmentary worldviews of cultural margins, whether sexual, political, ethnical or religious. Characteristically, these new, decentralised and fragmented worldviews reject the “myths of totality” (Hassan, 1980 :190) in favour of competing “ideologies of fracture,” at-

tacking the notion of consensus and proposing instead the acknowledgment of “difference” in theory as well as in artistic practice (Hutcheon, 1988).

In the field of narrative, this reaction against humanism is linked to the widespread tendency towards the assumption of a tone of ironic and parodic playfulness and the flouting of the traditional realism-enhancing conventions of classic realism. At the centre of this rejection and ironisation of classic realism lies the theoretical belief in what has been described as “the death of the self,” that is, in the disappearance of the “bourgeois individual subject” as a valid philosophical concept, a phenomenon which, according to Fredric Jameson, is postmodernism’s most radical insight:

Not only is the bourgeois individual subject a thing of the past, it is also a myth: it never really existed in the first place; there have never been autonomous subjects of that type. Rather this construct is merely a philosophical and cultural mystification which sought to persuade people that they ‘had’ individual subjects and possessed this unique personal identity. (Waugh, 1989:1-2)

Jameson’s contention is that the “unity of the self” (or “of character”) is simply one of the most cherished artificial constructions both of the patriarchal system and of realistic fiction alike. That is, Jameson is pointing out the rejection by postmodernism of the traditional definition of the self as a coherent, indivisible and continuous whole which, according to Rosemary Jackson (1981:82-83), “has dominated Western thought for centuries and is celebrated in classic theatre and ‘realistic’ art alike.”

Indeed, not only postmodernist fiction but also much modernist and post-structuralist writing show what Patricia Waugh (1989:20) has described as an “obsessive desire to displace human experience entirely by the substitution of intellectual categories and formal ‘impersonal structures.’” However, as this critic further observes, in fact “women writers on the whole, have not felt comfortable with an aesthetics of impersonality as it appears in many modernist and postmodernist manifestations.[...] For feminism the emphasis on ‘impersonality’ in all of these theories is problematic because deeply at odds with the practices of consciousness-rising and with women’s own experience of subordination and objectification.” (p. 20):

Subjectivity, historically constructed and expressed through the phenomenological equation self/other, necessarily rests masculine ‘self-hood’ upon feminine ‘otherness’. The subjective centre of socially dominant discourses (from Descartes’ philosophical, rational ‘I’ to Lacan’s psychoanalytic phallic/symbolic) in terms of power, agency, autonomy has been a ‘universal’ subject which has established its identity through the invisible marginalization or exclusion of what it has also defined as ‘femininity’ (whether this is the non-rational, the body, the emotions, or the pre-symbolic). (Waugh,1989:8)

Fredric Jameson’s contention that postmodernist writing is characterised by a consistent striving for the “death of the self,” then, further enhances the marginality of woman by omission, as it is apparently exclusively founded on the analysis of the writing practice of contemporary *male* writers. We should, then, ask ourselves what exactly is the position of contemporary *women* novelists with respect to postmodernism, indeed not trying to make them fit into a preconceived postmodernist pattern, but rather

with a view to finding out the way in which they are attempting to express their rejection of the "myths of totality" in favour of their own "ideology of fracture."

Patricia Waugh describes three major stages in the evolution of the contemporary feminist novel. In the decade of the sixties we find the kind of early feminist writing that "simply pursued the desire to reverse [the] duality ["self/other"] rather than deconstruct it." (Waugh, 1989:22) Characteristically, these novels still "adhered fundamentally to a liberal-humanist belief in the possibility of discovering a 'true' self, and simply substituted female for male heroes and preserved more or less traditional quest plots [as] the obvious structure through which to portray the self as an essence which might be 'discovered' or a unity which might be 'willed' into existence." (pp. 22-23) Although these early feminist texts did not truly challenge the dominant liberal view of subjectivity, they permitted the development of the second stage, characterised by the kind of more self-conscious fictional modes "which would more radically challenge dominant concepts of gender and identity." (Waugh, 1989: 23) Here Waugh mentions as the most representative trend the "novel of liberation" or "celebration of difference novel" written by, for example, the American Lisa Alther, Erica Jong, J. Rossner and Marilyn French, and strongly emerging in Britain in the 1970s in some of the writing of Margaret Drabble, Doris Lessing, and Alison Lurie. As Waugh explains, (1989 :23-24) "though 'essentialist' in its conception of the unity of woman and naïve in its reversal of the liberal theory of the subject (so that woman became the moral, spiritual, and psychological superiors of men, who are all characterized in terms of denial of emotionality, over-rationalization, competitiveness, and even brutality), they did suggest the necessity for what Adrienne Rich (1972) has called a 'revision of literature': a return to the traditional preoccupations of the psychological and domestic novel, but self-consciously from the perspective of writing as a woman." Waugh (1989: 24) points out a third stage of evolution towards more radical directions in the work of writers like Margaret Atwood and Emma Tennat –and we could add, in the work of Angela Carter and Jeanette Winterson as well– in which the construction of subjectivity is explored through "the role of symbolic systems and unconscious factors."

So, the development of contemporary female literature appears to be different from that of male writers in that, although they are growingly aware of the heterogeneity of women and although they are also perfectly aware of the naïveté involved in the striving for unity of the self, they still feel a need to experience themselves as 'subjects' before they can begin to problematize and to deconstruct the socially constructed-subject positions available to them, a task that women writers feel to be both frustratingly difficult and unavoidable for "if the 'I' spoken or positioned in a discourse where subjectivity, the norm of human-ness, is male, then the 'I' is doubly displaced, 'I' can never in any material or metaphysical sense be at one with myself." (Waugh,1989:11)

The contemporary woman's double sense of alienation deriving from the role of marginality allotted to her within the male dominated social and cultural structure, is reinforced by the position she is given in the scheme of the individuation process developed by psychoanalysis. Indeed, Freud's definition of selfhood is focused from the perspective of the male child and, as Patricia Waugh (1989: 21) points out, "is achieved predominantly by *separation*."² That is, the child's achievement of independent selfhood goes through the objectification and rejection of the mother, who – rather than the father– thus truly becomes the primal "other" from which the child

tries to separate himself. Reduced to this position of “otherness,” woman acquires a sense of identity only in the negative, as instrument and reflection of the “true” male individuals:

The dependent infant is regarded as having achieved autonomous subjectivity when, regarding the primary caretaker (almost always the mother or another *woman*) as simply an object against which it defines its subjectivity, an instrument of its needs, it becomes a ‘self’ by breaking free of her and asserting its own separateness, its difference, its boundaries. That ‘otherness’ analysed by feminists from de Beauvoir onwards thus becomes (from the male point of view) the *necessary* condition of women, so that separation and objectivity rather than relationship and connection become the markers of identity. (Waugh, 1989:21)

Confronted with this position of “otherness,” women writers often situate themselves within a psychoanalytic frame of reference, especially within the boundaries of Lacanian theory,³ with a view to working out their own imaginative response –or incapacity to find it–to what often appears as the inevitability of woman’s alienation within the socio-historical construct. Lacanian theory, with its emphasis on the natural tendency of the child to reach a notion of individuality through identification with the “ideal I” and so, through the relationship of “self” and “other,” offers the possibility of qualifying the Freudian notion of selfhood as *separation*, allowing for the formulation of what Patricia Waugh (1989:11) considers to be the most consistently feminist proposal for the achievement of self definition: an identity potentially defined, not through *separation*, but rather “through *relationship* in a more equal society” (emphasis added).

Jeanette Winterson’s third novel, *The Passion* (1987), perfectly fits into the frame of reference so far described. In line with earlier feminist fiction, *The Passion* takes up the traditional quest structure⁴ of the *Bindungsroman* as a way of fictionalising the individuation process of two, instead of one, main characters: a young man, Henri, Napoleon’s chicken cook and personal waiter; and a young woman, Villanelle, a Venetian boatsman’s daughter whose alienation and sense of “otherness” is double in that she exists under the double marginalization of being a woman and of having webbed feet, the attribute of male boatmen.

The parallel processes of individuation of Henri and Villanelle are set against the historical background of Napoleon’s imperialist wars described from the “fringe” perspectives of these two historically irrelevant narrators-characters.

Henri’s story is set in the utterly male, “realist” world of Napoleon’s imperialist campaigns, a world ruled by “rational” despotic order, with Napoleon himself as a potent symbol of patriarchal totalitarianism; Villanelle’s story, on the other hand, unfolds in much more feminine and uncanny world, ruled by hazard and situated in a Venice that simultaneously appears as real and as unreal, with inhabitants who alternately behave as perfectly commonsensical human individuals and as weirdly fantastic creatures. The oppositions order/hazard and real/unreal that exists between Henri’s and Villanelle’s worlds provides the basic dual structure of the novel. The male “real” world of Henri, ruled by order, is diametrically opposed to the female “unreal” world of Villanelle, ruled by chance. But both worlds and characters are not simply opposed, they are also complementary and mutually dependent, as can be gathered from the merging of both stories in one when Henri and Villanelle meet on the frozen

Russian fields of war, and from the fact that the realistic male world of Napoleon's campaigns also admits fantastic creatures, like Patrick, the de-frocked Irish priest "with the eagle eye" (p. 15) who "was usually to be found, like Simeon the Stylite, on the top of a purpose-built pillar. From there he could look out across the Channel and report on the whereabouts of Nelson's blockading fleet and warn our practising troops of any English threat." (p. 22)

As the novel's title suggests, every character in the novel is the victim of an overruling passion. Napoleon's ruling passion is devouring chicken and conquering foreign lands. The ruling passion of the Venetians is going to the casino, where Villanelle works as a croupier doing double shifts, dressed alternately as a man and then as a woman. Indeed, the collective passion of the Venetian is gambling, for "[p]leasure on the edge of danger is sweet. It's the gambler's sense of losing that makes the winning an act of love." (p. 137)

The Venetians' passion for gambling echoes that of the citizens of Babylon in Borges' tale "La loteria en Babilonia" (1989:456-460), where each individual's position on the social scale, the kind of job he has, his entertainments and even his right to life and death is exclusively ruled by lottery. Borges' tale takes to extremes the principle that life is ruled by hazard and dramatises the logical consequences of the gambler's pleasurable tormenting knowledge that his skill, that is, his ability to orient his life in a determined way, is always threatened by chance and so, that it cannot be pre-determined or directed in any desirable way.

But the most obviously direct intertext⁵ of "The Queen of Spades" chapter is Pushkin's fantastic tale "The Queen of Spades", a tale about the irrepressible passion for gambling of a young officer called Hermann, whose soul is compared to that of Mephistopheles (1967:186) and whose profile reminds Tomsky (p.186) and Lisavieta Ivanovna (p.189) of Napoleon. Pushkin's "The Queen of Spades" is the story of a "Devil's gambler" who tries to behave as an "astute gambler" only to be destroyed in the attempt. As Villanelle explains:

The astute gambler always keeps something back, something to play with another time [...]. But the Devil's gambler keeps back something precious, something to gamble with only once in a lifetime. Behind the secret panel he keeps it, the valuable, fabulous thing that no one suspects he has. (p. 90)

The passion for gambling Villanelle describes follows Freud's description of man's primal pleasure-seeking instinctual drive.⁶ It is a feeling "between fear and sex" (p. 55) the pleasure-seekers recklessly and even desperately look for at the Casino night after night, always waiting for the the gambler who will "put a challenge in such a way as to make it irresistible. We gamble with the hope of winning, but it's the thought of what we might lose that excites us." (p. 89) As Villanelle's tale of the Devil's gambler makes clear, the wager that would seduce the real gambler is "a life." (p. 91) Like Pushkin's "The Queen of Spades", Villanelle's tale has the Faustian overtones of a satanic pact: a "thoughtful man who they say had trade with gold and death" (p. 90) accepts as a wager the life of an unknown old man, who is openly associated with the devil. (p. 92) When, inevitably, the tradesman loses, he is sentenced to die through "dismemberment piece by piece beginning with the hands," (p. 93) a death that has the mythical overtones of the hero's ritual phase of *sparagmos*, or death by dismemberment, prior to his triumphant rebirth.

In a lecture on “Gambling and the Novel,” Gillian Beer (1990) explained how the gambler’s painfully pleasing knowledge functions in novels like Peter Carey’s *Oscar and Lucinda*, Cortazar’s *Hopscotch* or Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*—and we could add, in *The Passion* and in “La lotería en Babilonia” as well— as an apt metaphor for an existentialist conception of life that goes back to Pascal’s conception of faith in God as a wager on human destiny. Now, as Borges’ tale suggests, the idea of life as a wager can be retraced further back to Greek gnosticism and even further back to the Babylonian conception of hazard and of human life as an ever-changing flux ruled by fortune’s wheel.

As developed in *The Passion*, the story of the Devil’s gambler, with its central idea that “[p]leasure on the edge of danger is sweet” iconically synthesises the Freudian ambivalent pattern of repression and satisfaction of man’s primal instinctual drive, thus expressing the Venetians and Villanelle’s wish-fulfilment dream in the possibility of realisation of their most urgent needs and desires, confirming the validity of their pursuit.

This is the way to interpret Villanelle’s remark that every Venetian is obsessed with the possibility of finding “the wager that would seduce him into risking what he valued” (p. 90) for “[w]hat you risk reveals what you value” (p. 91) and there is always a “valuable, fabulous thing that everyone has and keeps a secret.” (p. 98) Villanelle’s fabulous thing is her heart, which she loses to the Queen of Spades, a mysteriously beautiful lady whose husband, a dealer in unique things, had spent all his life drawing the definitive map that would reveal to him the hiding place of the most absolute treasure of all, the Holy Grail itself. (p. 144)

The object of Henri’s passion is Napoleon. No sooner had the young Henri reluctantly separated himself from his mother, Georgette, for whom he felt a strong Oedipal attraction, that he, like the rest of French youths in the army, fell head over heels in love with this quintessential patriarchal figure:

All folly, but I think if Bonaparte had asked us to strap on wings and fly to St. James’s Palace we would have set off as confidently as a child lets loose a kite. Without him, during nights and days when affairs of state took him back to Paris, our nights and days were different only in the amount of light they let in. For myself, with no one to love, a hedgehog spirit seemed best and I hid my heart in the leaves. (p. 21)

Desperately in love with his Lacanian “je-idéal,”⁷ then, Henri, like so many other French revolutionaries, endured without a word of reproach eight terrible years of imperialist wars, never attempting to judge Napoleon’s orders, no matter how dangerous or how wrong, brutal, or unnecessary:

The barges were designed to carry sixty men and it was reckoned that 20,000 of us would be lost on the way over or picked off by the English before we landed. Bonaparte thought them good odds, he was used to losing that number in battle. None of us worried about being one of the 20,000. We hadn’t joined up to worry. (p. 20)

Indeed, Napoleon appears as totally self-centred, sending men to the slaughterhouse at the same rate that he devours fowl like an ogre in a fairy tale: “[h]e wishes his

whole face were mouth to cram a whole bird. In the morning I'll be lucky to find the wishbone." (p. 4)

The sight of these fowl Napoleon keeps in cages in great numbers "beaks and claws cut off, staring through the slats with dumb identical eyes" (pp. 5-6) produces in Henri the same horror a child might feel imagining Hansel and Gretel waiting in the cage to be eaten by the witch. As the symbology of the *coq gaulois*, emblem of the French nation, makes clear, Napoleon's passion for chicken symbolically expresses the all-consuming, never satisfied *hybris* of the Saturn-like Law-giver, devouring his own children in order to satisfy his ego. Henri knows that his love for Napoleon would never be returned, for

He was in love with himself and France joined in. It was a romance. Perhaps all romance is like that; not a contract between equal parties but an explosion of dreams and desires that can find no outlet in everyday life. Only a drama will do and while the fireworks last the sky is a different colour. He became an Emperor. (p. 13)

Like Henri, Villanelle suffers an "explosion of dreams and desires" when she first meets the lady with the beautiful "grey-green eyes with flecks of gold" and hair "darker and redder" than Villanelle's own, who wins the game of cards with the trump called "the Queen of Spades." (p. 59) Villanelle's love for the lady is, literally, a passion kindled at first sight. After the game of cards, the lady invited Villanelle to drink French champagne. "She held the glass in a silent toast [...] Still she did not speak, but watched me through the crystal and suddenly draining her glass stroked the side of my face. Only for a second she touched me and then she was gone and I was left with my heart smashing at my chest and three-quarters of a bottle of the best champagne. (p. 59)

The scene, with its emphasis on sight through glass ("she watched me through the crystal") strongly recalls Lacan's theory (1966) of the mirror stage synthesised above. Villanelle falls in love with the image she sees on the other side of the glass, which is the image of a woman who strikingly resembles her, with her sparkling grey-green eyes and dark red hair that match Villanelle's own "crop of red hair and a pair of eyes that made up for the sun's eclipse." (p. 51) With the wonderfully sophisticated French champagne loosening the grip of repression on Villanelle's unconscious, she is instantly taken by the beautiful sight of the lady's face that is projected through the glass, which she unconsciously recognises as an improved, unified, projection of herself.

As the child loses the reassuring unity with the mother characteristic of the pre-Oedipal phase, it has a feeling of absence it tries to satisfy by seeking for an object always out of reach on which to project its new and strong sexual desires. This primordial "other" is Lacan's "je-idéal," Freud's father figure in the Oedipal triangle, who simultaneously produces in the child contradictory feelings of exhilaration and of jealousy: exhilaration, as it offers to the child the contemplation of a marvellously coherent and improved projection of itself; jealousy, at the realization that there is an unbridgeable gap between the child's own bodily limitations and the ideal perfection of the all-powerful, highly inhibiting ideal ego.

Following the Lacanian pattern, Henri falls in love with Napoleon, the archetypal father figure and Henri's idealised projection of himself, while Villanelle falls in love with the red-haired lady, that is, with Villanelle's improved projection of herself. In-

evitably, in the long run, the love they feel will prove a source of frustration: Napoleon ignores Henri because he is too much in love with himself and The Queen of Spades has a husband she loves, although the lady herself, in her turn, cannot be totally sure of her husband's love:

Where was her husband this evening?
He had left her. [...]
'Will he come back'
'He may, he may not.' (p. 144)

So, passion for the "other" is never truly satisfied because it is never returned, thus frustrating the possibility of maturation through relationship and becoming instead a source of anxiety and jealousy, a confirmation, rather than a satisfaction, of absence, loss and imperfection. With impeccable symmetry, the novel presents Napoleon collecting the hearts of the French revolutionaries, while the Queen of Spades collects the hearts of her lovers in little glass phials kept in ebony boxes (p. 120) that recall the "vials of ivory and coloured glass" of the lady in "A Game of Chess" (Eliot, 1974:66).

Reflecting on his passion for Napoleon, Henri, like Villanelle, uses Lacanian mirror imagery to explain the ambivalent, pleasurable / painful quality of their relationship:

when I fell in love it was as though I looked into a mirror for the first time and saw myself [...] And when I had looked at myself and grown accustomed to who I was, *I was not afraid to hate parts of me because I wanted to be worthy of the mirror bearer*. Then, when I had regarded myself for the first time, I regarded the world and saw it to be more various and beautiful than I thought. (pp. 154 -155; my underlining)

Henri's passion for Napoleon, then, like Villanelle's passion for The Queen of Spades, conforms to the Lacanian mirror stage. Contemplating Napoleon's image, Henri feels a strong impulse to emulate the imaginary wholeness of his ideal ego, thus managing for the first time in his life to see himself as an individual in the same way as Villanelle's contemplation of the lady's image through the champagne glass helped her come to terms with herself. This exhilarating experience of the unification of the self in the passionate relationship with the "other" is only provisional, however, for, as Lacan explains, this first love is not really love for another person, but rather, for an idealized projection of his/her own self that, in the case of the male child, includes the desire to become one with the father, as Henri openly acknowledges when he compares Napoleon with the Czar:

[The Russians] called the Czar 'the Little Father', and they worshipped him as they worshipped God. In their simplicity I saw a mirror of my own longing and understood for the first time my own need for a little father that had led me this far. (p. 81)

When the child contemplates its own image in the mirror and discovers the contours and unity of the 'I' it simultaneously apprehends the existence of the 'not I', of

the world as separate and different from the self. So, as Henri states in his journal, "when I had regarded myself for the first time, I regarded the world and saw it to be more various and beautiful than I thought." (p. 155) This recognition of the world as different from the self signals the beginning of the child's maturation and often involves a sudden confrontation with the inevitability of death, that usually brings about the reversal of all the ideals and values that were earlier cherished. In "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1988b:2525), Freud describes this "instinct of the I" as the self-preserving instinctual tendency of every living organism to recover a previous state of inorganicism characterised by perfect stability and absence of tension.

Henri reaches this fulcrum in Russia after witnessing the atrocities committed by Napoleon and inflicted by the Russians upon themselves in their fear and hatred of the French. Following the Freudian symbolism, Henri himself is nearly killed and half blinded at Austerlitz.⁸ The recovery from his wounds and his subsequent desertion may be interpreted mythically as the crossing of the threshold from adolescence towards adulthood, or in psychological terms as the antithetical movement from the outward-looking to the inner-looking phase involving the reversal of his ideals and values:

They set fire to [Moscow...]. I served him that night on a scrawny chicken surrounded by parsley the cook cherishes in a dead man's helmet. I think it was that night I knew I couldn't stay any longer. I think it was that night that I started to hate him. (pp. 83-84)

After this, Henri rejects the totalitarian anonymity imposed by Napoleon and cherishes more than ever the affectionate relationship he has established with two other outstanding individuals, his friends Domino, Bonaparte's groom, and Patrick, the defrocked Irish priest.

Villanelle's individuation process follows the Lacanian, rather than the Freudian, pattern. After she fell in love with the Queen of Spades, Villanelle enjoyed "nine nights together and [...] never saw her again." She decided to stop meeting the lady once she understood that, although the lady was sexually attracted by her, it was her husband whom she truly loved: "I watched them together and saw more in a moment than I could have pondered in another year. They did not live in the fiery furnace she and I inhabited, but they had a calm and a way that put a knife to my heart." (p. 75) That is, Villanelle gives up the Queen of Spades, not because she is out of love with her and has reached the necessary *separation* stage, but rather as the result of a bout of Lacanian jealousy,⁹ when she sees the relationship The Queen of Spades has with her husband and realises her "difference", her "lack" and inadequacy as an individual.

We can say, then, that Villanelle reaches her fulcrum at this moment of climactic jealousy when she realised that she would never be able to resemble either the Queen of Spades or her husband, either her ideal image of woman or of man. Her rejection and separation of the loved object fills Villanelle with entropic "instincts de destruction voire de mort," (Lacan, 1966:95) pushing her to do what we can interpret as a suicidal act.¹⁰ Yielding to a masochistic drive of self-dejection she decides to punish herself with the most horrible future she can conceive of: marrying the villanous and repulsive cook, now turned meat dealer, whom she had met at the Casino and who had taken with him "the Jack of hearts." (p. 56) By so doing, Villanelle shows herself as a being so totally dependent on others for self-definition that solitude can only be experienced as physical *sparagmos* and as psychical disintegration of identity.

Henri's passion for Napoleon ended up with his mutilation and desertion, that is, in Freudian symbolism, with his half-castration and flight; Villanelle's marriage to the meat man will end up in the feminine equivalent of Henri's sacrificial *sparagmos*: after losing a wager, Villanelle will be sold by her husband as an army prostitute, thus obliging her to repeat *ad infinitum* what a soldier had forced her to do as payment for another lost wager, literally, to undergo sexual crucifixion:

We went to his room and he was a man who liked his women face down, arms outstretched like the crucified Christ. (p. 70)

It is only after Villanelle and Henri have reached this fulcrum, that they are allowed to meet for the first time. Throughout the wars Henri had been tormented by an idea that would never have occurred to Napoleon, namely the possibility that, for all the apparent homogeneity of snow, "every snowflake [might be] different." (pp. 42 and 81) After eight years in the army, at the climax of his physical and mental disintegration, Henri meets Villanelle who has become one of the few surviving *vivandières* in Russia. This woman, who (unlike Christ who was only crucified once), has been forced to lie with hundreds, perhaps thousands of men, tells Henri laughing that "the Russians could hide under the snowflakes" and that:

'They are all different.'
'What?'
'Snowflakes. Think of that.'
I did think of that and I fell in love with her. (pp. 87-88)

Developing Freud's theories, Jacques Lacan has pointed out the importance of seeing the development of the self as inseparable from the subject's acquisition of language, for language is the means by which the social code is created and sustained. In this light, it is significant that, when Henri falls in love with Villanelle, he does not do so at first sight but, having already overcome his mirror-stage phase, he now falls in love with her *due to what she says*. What she says amounts to an exaltation of "difference", confirming Villanelle's faith in individual selfhood in the old humanist terms. If we consider language as the code capable of creating and sustaining—and of undermining—social structures, we may agree that Villanelle's admission that snowflakes—and the people who can hide under them—may have individual identity and value is a direct blow aimed at the core of Napoleon's anti-humanist, totalitarian system, for, as Henri reflects,

[i]f that were true, how could the world go on? How could we ever get up off our knees? How could we ever recover from the wonder? (pp. 42-43)

In Napoleon's world, snowflakes and people have no individual value, soldiers and enemies alike are discussed in numbers, so, for example, when two thousand men are drowned, "2,000 new recruits marched into Boulogne." (p. 25) Even Napoleon's personal service is attended by anonymous individuals: he keeps a huge horse with "the evil eye" who is accountable for "almost as many dead grooms in the stable as

chickens on the table. The ones the beast didn't kill itself with an easy kick, its master had disposed of because its coat didn't shine or the bit was green." (p. 3)

For Napoleon soldiers, grooms and cooks are all alike, disposable and easily replaceable ciphers. So he does not realise, for example, that Henri is totally different from and morally superior to the villainous cook, or that Domino, his latest groom, a "midget clinging to the mane and whooping in his funny language" (p. 3) –Corsican, like Napoleon's– was a brave and accomplished circus acrobat and so unique an individual that, until he died, the icicle enclosing his gold chain refused to melt even in the hot summer weather of Venice. (p. 152) Also unique was Napoleon's Irish watch and sentinel, Patrick, "whose left eye could put the best telescope to shame." (p. 21) Indeed, Napoleon was surrounded by extraordinary individuals, but he was incapable of noticing their uniqueness. Consistently with this moral bluntness, Napoleon's world literally and also figuratively metamorphoses into a zero-degree waste land of totalitarian anonymity.

The third chapter, "The Zero Winter" is Jeanette Winterson's version of this waste land. Its title parodies the question that closes the first section of "Little Gidding": "[w]here is the summer, the unimaginable / Zero summer?" (Eliot, 1974:214) For T.S. Eliot, the "unimaginable zero summer" is the season out of time's covenant the traveller finds at the end of his journey, when the quester eventually realises either the futility of the purpose that had led him there or that "the purpose is beyond the end you figured." (p. 215) T.S. Eliot describes this "zero summer" with two opposed seasonal images, as "midwinter spring", that is, as a brief moment when the "sun flames the ice" in the middle of winter, and with the contrary image of spring time suddenly "blanched for an hour with transitory blossom / Of snow." In both cases, the images are positive, for in the first one, the ice cold of winter is unexpectedly warmed by the sun and, in the second, the hedges seem to bloom again "with voluptuary sweetness." (p. 214) In accordance with his religious faith, T.S. Eliot's end of the road is not a place "to verify,/ Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity/Or carry report. You are here to kneel/ Where prayer has been valid." (p. 215)

Deprived of this metaphysical meaning and consolation, T.S. Eliot's "zero summer" becomes Jeanette Winterson's "zero winter", from which the cosiness of Eliot's waste land, in which "[w]inter kept us warm, covering/Earth in forgetful snow, feeding/ A little life with dried tubers" (1974:63) has been totally obliterated. In the frozen Russian fields of war the earth offers no shelter, the snow no kindness or warmth:

When our horses died of the cold we slit their bellies and slept with our feet inside the guts. One man's horse froze around him; in the morning when he tried to take his feet out they were stuck, entombed in the brittle entrails. We couldn't free him, we had to leave him. He wouldn't stop screaming. (p. 80)

However, in Russia, Henri, like Eliot's quester, finds that the purpose he had in mind when he enrolled with Napoleon was "beyond the end he figured". Watching his enemies, he suddenly realises that "I had been taught to look for monsters and devils and I found ordinary people." (p. 105) After this, Henri understands the futility of the whole journey and yearns to return home: "[h]ome became the focus of joy and sense," (p. 83) but unlike the mythical hero, Henri knows that the hope of return is only a self indulgent lie:

And the heaviest lie? That we could go home and pick up where we had left off. That our hearts would be waiting behind the door with the dog. Not all men are as fortunate as Ulysses. (p. 83)

So, instead of returning home, he undertakes a further journey to Venice, thus initiating the inward-looking journey away from the world (the “Umwelt”) and into the depth of his own psyche (the “Innenwelt”),¹¹ as the title of the fourth chapter suggests. The title of the fourth chapter, “The Rock,” which refers to the San Servelo madhouse where Henri is imprisoned after the cook’s murder, immediately echoes T.S. Eliot’s “rock” in the *The Waste Land*, especially in “What the Thunder Said,” (1974:76-77) where the dryness of the rock is mitigated by the regenerating and fructifying capacity of water: “sound of water over a rock / Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees,” (Eliot, 1974:76) in a way that recalls the San Servelo madhouse surrounded by water, while the name of the island, “San Servelo,” inevitably puns with the Italian word for brain, “cervello,” thus confirming our intuition that Henri is now immersed in the inward-looking phase of his psychological quest.

Before being sent to the madhouse, Henri and Villanelle had established a love relationship that progressively allowed them to forget the horrors of the war and to recover a sense of being. The kind of love Henri feels for Villanelle is quite different from the narcissistic infatuation he felt for Bonaparte:

Her. A person who is not me. I invented Bonaparte as much as he invented himself.

My passion for her, even though she could never return it, showed me the difference between inventing a lover and falling in love.

The one is about you, the other about someone else. (p. 156)

Falling in love with Villanelle, Henri comes to understand the difference between the Lacanian narcissistic “love for the ‘ideal I’” he felt for Napoleon and the adult, mature “love for the ‘other’” he feels for Villanelle and this knowledge brings about the end of his individuation process:

I think now that being free is not being powerful or rich or well regarded or without obligations but being able to love. To love someone else enough to forget about yourself even for one moment is to be free. (p. 154)

Being a man, Henri conceives the fulfilment of love in patriarchal terms as the building of a nuclear family. Villanelle, however, is incapable of adequately responding to this kind of love. She refuses to marry Henry, insisting on offering him only pleasurable sex and brotherly love. That is to say, instead of accepting the role of woman in the patriarchal family scheme, Villanelle proposes to Henri the kind of “primary affectional relationship” that women writers often present in their novels as “essential for the survival of the human race.” (Waugh, 1989:44)

This situation comes to an end with the reappearance of Villanelle’s revengeful husband, his murder at Henri’s hands and Henri’s confinement in the madhouse. As a consequence of the cook’s murder, Henri sees Villanelle’s webbed feet, that is, her emblem of “difference,” and he instantaneously goes mad. He is then convicted and

confined to the madhouse, where he suffers terrible bouts of schizophrenia, during which he tries to estrangle himself with his own hands, which he takes to belong to the cook's ghost. When Villanelle plans his escape from the madhouse, Henri not only refuses to follow her instructions, but even to see Villanelle again, although he is very much in love with her and he knows that she is expecting a child of his. At first sight, the fact that Villanelle is pregnant may be read as evidence that she has overcome her suicidal phase, as indeed she has, and that her life has come to a final phase of lasting happiness accepting her role as mother. However, in the context of Freud's theory of the sexual and entropic instinctual drives, Villanelle's pregnancy may simultaneously be read as proof of the victory of the sexual instinct of procreation and perpetuation of the species over the entropic or "ego instinct," working towards the tensionless preservation of individual life, and so, as evidence that her vital cycle is at an end.

Similarly, Henri's refusal to go out of the Servelo madhouse and to see Villanelle and the baby again may be read in two, apparently contradictory ways. On the one hand, it may signify that Henri, incapable of accepting the relationship of brotherly love and equality Villanelle offers, has yielded to the temptation of regression to a pre-Oedipal stage and is trying to hide for ever in the womb-like darkness of the madhouse. This reading would be fostered by Henri's bouts of schizophrenia, proving in practice his fragmentation of the self, and also by his lingering Oedipal attraction for his mother, whose ghost also daily visits him: "[t]his is my home, I can't leave. What will my mother say?" (p. 149)

Nevertheless, in due course of time, the ghostly visits and the schizophrenic fits progressively decrease, allowing Henri to devote his time and energy to two apparently trifling tasks, which however, have interesting symbolic implications: he cultivates an Eliotean "rose garden"¹² and he completes and re-reads his war journal/diary. There is no need to explain the symbology of Eliot's "rose garden", built on the accumulation and variation of edenic and romance overtones; so, suffice it to say that, cultivating this rose garden, Henri may be seen as aspiring to achieve Freud's entropic tensionless preservation of individual life, that most radical form of the pleasure principle – what T. S. Eliot (1974:223) called a "condition of complete simplicity (costing no less than everything)" capable of granting him his "shantih" – "The Peace which passeth understanding." – (Eliot, 1974:86)

In keeping with the duality of the psychological reading, the novel ends leaving Villanelle and Henri on their own and yet inextricably united in the person of their baby daughter, who, as the living emblem of the merging of Henri's and Villanelle's worlds, will soon become a woman boatsman without webbed feet, that is, a woman without any visible tokens of "marginality," who will in due time master the male art of boat steering.

So, in *The Passion*, as we have seen, Jeanette Winterson, in agreement with other feminist writers, fictionalises the difficulties of achieving a truly humane, socially and culturally unconditioned, sense of being. Creating a bisexual heroine who rejects the role of woman as primal "other" in a male world of totalitarian anonymity, and a hero who, for all his brain-washing in anti-humanist repression, still has the capacity to love, Winterson shows the horrors of the male "myths of totality and impersonality" that work to suppress passion, human affection and "difference." As the novel's title makes clear, Jeanette Winterson proposes the building of individuality, not through the separation of the male subject and the alienation of the female "other," but rather

through “passion,” that is, through an affective relationship involving both free sexual intercourse on a footing of equality (instead of the Freudian sado-masochistic relationship exemplified by the relationship between the cook and Villanelle), and the construction of a communal sense of fraternal love among individuals (portrayed in the relationship between Villanelle, Henri, Patrick and Domino).

This serious and radically humanist message is ironised, however, by the awareness that the text we have in our hands is nothing other than Henri’s war journal/diary, a fact that adds a metafictional dimension to the novel, suggesting the possibility that Henri might have been writing himself and Villanelle into existence. This possibility adds a fictional colouring to Villanelle’s affirmation of “difference” and freedom and to Henri’s achievement of entropic peace, reminding the reader that their heroic struggles have only taken place within the cardboard covers of the fictional text that contains them.

This metafictional element, enhanced by the novel’s relish in pastiche, parody and stylistic virtuosity, aligns *The Passion* with other contemporary metafictional works, while its insistence on re-writing Napoleon’s historical campaigns from the de-centred perspective of two historically negligible and marginal characters, allows us to situate *The Passion* within that new literary trend Linda Hutcheon (1988) has called “historiographic metafiction,” a trend which, significantly enough, Hutcheon considers to be the only one that really fulfills the basically contradictory nature of the postmodernist ethos.

Linda Hutcheon (1988:124) has explained the appearance of this new kind of historical novel as a response to the formalist closure proposed by modernism, and so, as expression of the necessity of fiction to “open itself up to history, to what Edward Said (1983) calls the “world.” But, interestingly enough,

it seems to have found that it can no longer do so in any remotely innocent way, and so those un-innocent paradoxical historiographic metafictional works situate themselves within historical discourse, while refusing to surrender their autonomy as fiction. And it is a kind of seriously ironic parody that often enables this contradictory doubleness: the intertexts of history and fiction take on parallel status in the parodic reworking of the textual past of both the ‘world’ and literature.” (Hutcheon, 1988:124)

The “seriously ironic parody” and the overtly metafictional approach to history attempted by historiographic metafiction is in keeping with the contradictory doubleness of postmodernist culture, a doubleness Linda Hutcheon extends to the relationship of historiographic metafiction “to what we usually label our dominant, liberal humanist culture”. According to this critic (1988:6), [historiographic metafiction] “does not deny [the liberal humanist dominant], as some have asserted [...]. Instead, it contests it from within its own assumptions. Modernists like Eliot and Joyce have usually been seen as profoundly humanistic [...] in their paradoxical desire for stable aesthetic and moral values, even in the face of their realization of the inevitable absence of such universals. Postmodernism differs from this, not in its humanistic contradictions, but in the provisionality of its response to them.”

Linda Hutcheon’s insistence on the contradictory nature of the relationship established by historiographic metafiction both with literature and history and with the liberal humanist dominant allows us to regard the *The Passion* as a truly postmodernist

novel, and as one that, going beyond impersonality and ludic formalist closure, makes a most radical proposal: the recovery of the old humanist values through the de-centering of the dominant male “myths of totality” in Western history, culture and society and the –avowedly provisional and inconclusive– re-definition of the roles of man and woman within the duality “self/other” from a new, more passionate and humane, as well as overtly fantastic and literary, feminine perspective.

Notes

1. The research carried out for the writing of this paper has been financed by the Spanish Ministry of Education (DGICYT: Programa Sectorial de Promoción General del Conocimiento, No. PS90-0117).
2. For Freud the evolution of the self is carried out in three basic stages, according to the object of instinctual desire: the first one is the child’s narcissistic stage of self-love. During this stage the child knows only himself and cannot tell the difference between “self” and “other” and so cannot develop the notion of “self” as opposed to the rest of the world. The second one is the stage of attachment to love objects. During this stage the child loses the reassuring unity with the mother characteristic of the pre-Oedipal phase and tries to identify with the father, who, according to Freud, is the primal “other”, for it is the father who forbids incest, threatens with castration and, by placing an absolute prohibition upon the child’s desire for the mother, becomes the inhibiting agent of external Law. The third stage is achieved when the adult subordinates the pleasure principle to the requirements of the reality principle, that is, as Freud explained in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle”, (1988b:2507-2541), when without relinquishing the final achievement of pleasure, man accepts its postponement and even the renunciation of some ways of achieving it, patiently accepting displeasure as a round-about way to fulfilling desire. This postponement of pleasure is dictated by the “reality principle,” the necessity to come to terms with the external world.
3. Reading Freud “from within”, Jacques Lacan (*Ecrits*, 1966), has added interesting insights into Freud’s theory of the self. One of Lacan’s most fruitful additions to Freud’s theory of the self is his analysis of the transitional stage between primary narcissism (love for self) and attachment to loved objects (love for others) which he describes as *le stade du miroir* (“the mirror stage”). According to Lacan (1966:89), this mirror stage is reached by the human individual between the ages of six months and eighteen months, when, despite its imperfect control over its own body, it is first able to imagine itself as a coherent, self-governing entity, as it contemplates its own reflection in a mirror.
4. On the symbolic and narrative structure of *The Passion*, see Omega (1993).
5. John Ash (1988: 5) has also pointed out the parallelisms with Alejo Carpentier’s *El reino de este mundo* and with Angela Carter’s fiction in general. Other clear intertextual referents of *The Passion* are The Queen of Spades in *Alice in Wonderland*, Euripides’ *Medea*, Joyce’s *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*, and, indeed, T.S. Eliot’s major poetry *en bloc*.
6. As early as “Totem and Taboo” (1912-13), Freud explained the development of the self as a complex, culturally and historically conditioned phenomenon resulting from an ambivalent pattern of repression and satisfaction of man’s primal instinctual drive, which is a pleasure-seeking drive. Now, in the most primitive forms of human society, the necessity of the group to control and limit the individual’s instinctual tendency to satisfy pleasure invariably gives way to the creation of the taboo, a very ancient prohibition imposed from an external authority and aimed at the repression of man’s most intense desires. The individual who obeys the taboo has an ambivalent attitude to it: he fears it enormously, but is

also extraordinarily tempted by it, for the magic power of the taboo lies in its capacity to put temptation into man's way. It behaves like a contagion in the sense that example is always contagious and also in the sense that the forbidden and repressed desire is displaced to other objects by the unconscious. (Freud, 1988a:1969)

7. For Lacan, the mirror-stage is a crucial phase in the evolution of the human being because it brings about for a brief moment the exhilarating experience of the identification of the "je" (Freud's "ich" or "ego") with the "je-idéal" (Freud's "ideal ich" or "super-ego"). But whereas for Freud this identification would represent a stage in the way towards adulthood, or "genital maturity" and so, towards the acceptance of the "reality principle", for Lacan the mirror stage is important because, as Malcolm Bowie (1988:105) explains, "it represents a permanent tendency of the individual: the tendency that leads him throughout life to seek and foster the imaginary wholeness of an 'ideal' ego. The unity invented at these moments, and the ego that is the product of successive inventions are both spurious: they are attempts to find ways round certain inescapable factors of lack, absence and incompleteness in human life." For Lacan, the primary function of the mirror stage is to establish a relationship between the individual and outward reality, that is, between Freud's "Innenwelt" and the "Umwelt" (Lacan, 1966: 93), between self and world. This relationship is strained, however, by the child's perception of its own bodily limitations (la "prématuration spécifique de la naissance" [Lacan's 1966:93]), a perception that renders the child's striving for the ideal perfection and wholeness it contemplates in the "ideal-ego" thoroughly dramatic. Thus, the moment of achievement of the mirror stage inaugurates both the identification of "self" and "other" and the drama of primordial jealousy, which, together, constitute the basic dialectics that will thereafter relate the ego to social situations. (Lacan, 1966:93)
8. That is, half castrated, in Freudian terms. (1988b: 2488-91)
9. According to Lacan, the clash between the original narcissistic instinctual tendency towards fulfilment of natural desire and the alienating aggressivity derived from the jealousy inherent in any type of relationship between "self" and "other" is often resolved by an attempt to return to the state of undifferentiation prior to the mirror stage, when the child still is its own ideal and experiences no discrepancy between "self" and "other". Lacan, describes this entropic tendency as "des instincts de destruction voire de mort." (1966:95)
10. Villanelle's behaviour here also recalls the bout of jealousy that brought about the suicide attempt of the eighteen-year old lesbian patient of Freud's in "Über die Psychogenese eines Falles von weiblicher Homosexualität." (1988b:2545)
11. According to psychoanalysis, the individuation process encompasses the whole life, but falls naturally into two halves. The first half is concerned with the individual's relationship to the world outside himself (Freud's "Umwelt"); it is directed towards the development of the conscious mind and the stabilization of the ego. The second half reverses this process and confronts the ego with the depths of its own psyche, seeking to establish links with the inner self (Freud's "Innenwelt"), the true centre of consciousness.
12. Indeed, Henri's gardening activities also bring to mind the decision of Voltaire's hero, Candide, to retire from the world on reflection that "il faut cultiver notre jardin." (*Candide*, 1972 (1759):233-4)

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