

Multiplying Narratives, Disclosing Bodies



Story-Telling and Embodiment in Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* and *The PowerBook*

Annabel Margaret van Baren – 9802185
Doctoraal Scriptie Engelse Taal en Cultuur
Universiteit Utrecht – Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen – april 2007
Begeleider: Dr. R.G.J.L. Supheert
Tweede lezer: Dr. W.Z. van den Doel
Cijfer: 9

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PROLOGUE

My education at the English department of Utrecht University has informed, formed, and inspired me in multiple ways. Most of all, it has given me a thorough foundational passion for literature in its infinite shapes and forms, as well as catalysing my desires for teaching during my two-year student assistantship for the English language proficiency courses. The James Boswell Institute in Utrecht further developed my skills and experiences in teaching: I am thankful to my Chinese students for their patience and enthusiasm. The Students of Utrecht Drama Society (SUDS) fuelled my budding passions for all things performative, which remain an integral part of my life.

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INTRODUCTION

'Trust me. I'm telling you stories.'
(Winterson, *The Passion* 40)

Jeanette Winterson was born in 1959, and grew up in Accrington, Lancashire, in the United Kingdom. She published her first novel, *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*, in 1985. Her debut proved an immediate success, and won the Whitbread Best First Novel Award of 1985. In 1987, Winterson became a full-time writer.

This thesis focuses upon Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry*, published in 1989, and secondly upon *The PowerBook*, which was published in 2000. Predominantly, the critical reception of Winterson's novels in general, and of *Sexing the Cherry* and *The PowerBook* in particular, focuses either on the postmodern or on the lesbian elements of the novels. Especially *Sexing the Cherry* has sparked substantial debate as to its lesbian elements. Merja Makinen states that Winterson "herself has helped fuel the debate as to whether her texts are successful lesbian texts" (2). In an interview in 1992, Winterson said that while she "herself was a lesbian feminist, [her] work should not be seen under that definition" (2). The debates on whether Winterson should be positioned as a lesbian writer are heated and on-going.¹ Broadly speaking, this debate entails positioning her works as universalising, and hence normalising, lesbianism; alternatively, other critics regard her works as successfully deconstructing gender identities. The question whether Winterson should be considered a postmodern writer has, instead, resulted in a general consensus of affirmation. Winterson's meta-narrative and self-reflexive texts, which challenge the divisions between fact and fiction, reality and fantasy, and femininity and masculinity all

¹ In the debate concerning Winterson's status as a lesbian writer, especially Lynne Pearce has been vocal. She provides a clear overview of the debate until 1994, and does so by surveying Winterson's first three novels. Her main argument is that Winterson's novels are popular because they allow a reading of a universalising lesbian love: "This is an ambivalence that centres on the tension between the perception of romantic love as a non-gendered, a-historic, "cultural universal", and as an "ideology" which the specificities of gender and sexual orientation constantly challenge and undermine. By attending to the "universalising" discourses in Winterson's work the (heterosexual) "general reader" can, of course, see the texts as transcending the particulars of sexual orientation; regard the fact that s/he is reading about lovers of the same sex as incidental and, consequently, a-political. Indeed, the fact that in her later fiction Winterson has shown many different combinations of love-relationship (homosexual and heterosexual) has, perhaps, contributed to the reader's impression of (great) "Love" as being transcendent of history, culture and gender" (149).

point towards her status as a postmodern writer. Some critics, however, argue that Winterson is not so much a postmodern writer as a modern one as she explicitly names herself an heir to Virginia Woolf's modernist style.

In particular, the critical analyses of *Sexing the Cherry* stem generally from journals of contemporary literature as well as from postmodern literary journals and anthologies investigating lesbian fiction. Interestingly, the reviews of *Sexing the Cherry* have more prominence than those of her previous novel, *The Passion* (1987). At the time of writing (2007), many educational programmes feature Winterson's works, and at least five books focus on her oeuvre by either analysing it through the lens of feminist theory, postmodern studies, or science studies. In most of these explorations, *Sexing the Cherry* is compared to her earlier works of fiction; as a result, most analyses draw connections between her novels, identifying their common elements. The critical reception of the novel, in the fields of postmodern and contemporary literary studies, focuses on the way in which time and matter constitute the central focus of the novel. Holloway finds the subversion in the novel specifically feminist and therefore alienating. McLeish regards the novel as culturally wide-ranging, envisioning Winterson as a skilful author of the carnivalesque, whereas MacKay, in the *Times Literary Supplement*, regards *Sexing the Cherry* as engaging in the rewriting of history. In feminist studies and lesbian studies, the character of the Dog-Woman has received primary attention, whereas the other characters of the novel are not focused upon extensively. In these studies, no general consensus is found: some critics argue that the Dog-Woman is an empowered and empowering figure, whereas others find Winterson's monstrous character a negative portrayal of femininity. Not one investigation pays specific attention to the use of symbols in the novel, which serve to identify its multiple narrators. On the whole, the focus of these analyses lies either on its representation of monstrous and/or ambiguously gendered bodies or on its relation to story-telling.

The PowerBook has, as yet, received little attention from literary critics. It is noticeable that essays on Winterson's novels only begin to appear some time after the publication of each text, usually ranging from four to eight years. Perhaps these dates indicate that

Winterson's novels are ahead of their time and academic critics only realise this much later. The few critical analyses and reviews that exist of *The PowerBook* are consensual in their negative reception of the novel. Baker argues that the novel consists of oddly assorted stories, and regards Winterson's prose as banal. Boddy states that Winterson is simply repeating her earlier theme of being in love with a married woman. Some critical analyses argue that the use of computers as a narrative trope is not developed in any depth, of which Boddy's critique is most resolute, adding that many of the comments about the new technology in the novel are unsurprising. Kellaway, instead, is enthusiastic about the novel, as she admires Winterson's assured juxtaposition of philosophy, humour and the real with an "elegance" that sustains the complex mix of these divergent discourses.

Building on the divergent critical readings that exist of Winterson's texts, this thesis examines in which way the themes of embodiment and story-telling interconnect in *Sexing the Cherry* and *The PowerBook*. Thus, instead of analysing Winterson's texts from a postmodern and/or lesbian angle, which constitutes the main focus of many investigations of her texts, the thesis aims to explore whether these intersecting themes of embodiment and story-telling propose innovative ways to represent bodies and narrate stories.

As a method of analysis, to provide possible answers to the question of how the themes of story-telling and embodiment interconnect, other disciplines have been added to the initial methodological and theoretical tools of literary studies. Thus, psychoanalytic theories, women's studies, philosophy and science studies have been included to the methods of close-reading and textual analysis. The elements presented in *Sexing the Cherry* and *The PowerBook* are analysed through the lens of several theories. Firstly, Kristeva's psychoanalytical concept of the *abject* is used as one of the tools to highlight the subject matter of the novels. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva describes the abject as that which "disturbs identity, system and order... [and] does not respect borders, positions, rules" (4). In this way, Kristeva refers to the abject as that which threatens the subject by transgressing the bodily boundaries between self and other, challenging bodily

identity. Most of what is abject centres around the body: vomit, blood, saliva, filth, waste, pus, bodily fluids, and open wounds: those substances which are disturbing because they turn insides out. These matters are unmentionable materials which should not be represented, precisely because they dissolve the acceptable boundaries between what is inside and what is outside. This binary opposition between the inner and the outer can be stretched to include other binary divisions: feminine and masculine is one of the oppositions that are blurred, both in *Sexing the Cherry* and *The PowerBook*. Progressing from the concept of the abject, it can be stated that bodies are brought into "being" in the text through narration, and that they are simultaneously shaped by these stories. The methods of story-telling are as fragmented as the represented multi-layered and changeable bodies. The narratives consist of patchwork-like collections of various styles and sources.

Secondly, Hayles' theory of media-specific analysis is used to examine the material construction of *Sexing the Cherry* and *The PowerBook*. Both novels take the form of print fiction, and are, as most works of print fiction, composed of printed sheets of paper which were subsequently bound. The edition of *Sexing the Cherry* that is analysed is a paperback, whereas *The PowerBook* is in hardcover form. Even though the material construction of the text may seem insignificant, the theoretical tool of media-specific analysis, abbreviated MSA, suggests otherwise. Using Hayles' theory of MSA, an attempt is made to explore which strategies are used in *Sexing the Cherry* and *The PowerBook* to produce meaning in the text. Printed books have existed for such a long time that their format is easily taken for granted as something unquestionable. Through Hayles' book *Writing Machines*, an attempt is made to show one of the ways in which the material construction of the text can be made visually explicit. Furthermore, by doing so, it is explored in which manner the material construction of *The PowerBook* is made explicit.

In this thesis, the analysis of body-representations of the characters in *Sexing the Cherry* and *The PowerBook* presupposes that these bodies are inherently gendered. The focus lies

solely on the way the characters' *gender* is represented and not their *sex*.² Gender, in my perspective, is a socially, politically, historically and institutionally inscribed marker. Throughout this thesis the terms "feminine" or "masculine" always refer to the category of gender. In *Sexing the Cherry*, for instance, Jordan, the only male character of the novel, crosses gender boundaries, in the sense that he occasionally transfers to a feminine position by wearing feminine clothes. Thus, Jordan remains sexed as male throughout the novel, and exchanges his social position of masculinity for a feminine one. The sixteenth-century character Ali of *The PowerBook* similarly changes gender-roles: she wears a tulip stem and two bulbs to assume a masculine position. Through this addition, she is viewed as masculine and also refers to herself as masculine. Thus, Ali remains sexed as female throughout the novel, and interchanges her social position of femininity for a masculine one.

In deciding on a thesis topic, the immediate choice was to analyse *Sexing the Cherry*: a novel first encountered during the course *Writing & Gender* at University College Dublin. The critical reception of *Sexing the Cherry*, as was mentioned above, predominantly focuses either on the representation of monstrous or ambiguously gendered bodies in the novel, or it examines the way in which story-telling is presented in the novel. These critical analyses of the novel do not elaborate on the connection between the themes of story-telling and embodiment. To understand the way in which the themes of story-telling and embodiment function in Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry*, it is compared to a second novel by Winterson. By contrasting *Sexing the Cherry* to another novel by the same author, its methods to represent story-telling and embodiment would become more apparent, and provide a more precisely defined definition of the themes, compared to analysing *Sexing the Cherry* independently. For a comparative analysis *The PowerBook* was chosen. Published in 2000, eleven years after *Sexing the Cherry*, its subject-matter of virtual communication appeared a productive counter-balance to the focus of *Sexing the Cherry* on re/writing history. The critical reception of *The PowerBook*, as was mentioned above, is not extensive, and predominantly negative. These analyses of the

² Importantly, in Feminist/Gender/Women's Studies the terms "sex" and "gender" and their respective relationship to or difference from each other is under constant debate; moreover, it is the major concern of this discipline. Given the focus of this thesis, I do not feel a detailed analysis of these terms is called for.

novel neither analyse its narrative structure nor engage in analysing the way the characters' (gendered) bodies are represented. Even though *Sexing the Cherry* and *The PowerBook* are both products of Winterson's fruitful imagination, the novels are different in style, poetic rhythm, and narrative structure; importantly, they are separated by eleven years of time. Even though "time is a great deadener" (Winterson, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* 91; *Sexing the Cherry* 123) many instances of cross-fertilisation occur between these two novels. The thematic structure that is used in this thesis aims to draw connections between the two themes and the two novels simultaneously.

The thesis consists of two parts: part one deals with the theme of story-telling, whereas the focus of part two lies on embodiment. Subsequently, each part is divided into two chapters: the first focuses on *Sexing the Cherry* and the second deals with *The PowerBook*. The first chapter of part one on story-telling, posits that the relationship between past and present in *Sexing the Cherry* is represented as fluid. The chapter analyses how history and story-telling are expressed by the two main narrators. Chapter two remains focused on the theme of story-telling, and explores how, in *The PowerBook*, time is displayed and displaced, and which methods are used to disrupt the linearity of time. Additionally, this chapter investigates the effects of new technologies on the narrative structure of the novel. Both in *Sexing the Cherry* and *The PowerBook*, an anti-linear view of time is displayed, as both novels refer to a fluid conception of time. Part two on embodiment opens with chapter three, investigating which representational strategies Winterson uses in *Sexing the Cherry* to describe the character of the Dog-Woman, and her and other characters' body-weight. Lastly, chapter four questions how in *The PowerBook* the characters' genders are represented. Thus, both in *Sexing the Cherry* and *The PowerBook*, Winterson subverts bodily and gendered stereotypes and provides alternative ways of representing these categories.

PART ONE

STORY-TELLING

CHAPTER ONE

STORY-TELLING IN SEXING THE CHERRY

1.1 DISRUPTING THE LAWS OF PHYSICS: ANTI-LINEAR TIME

The Hopi, an Indian tribe, have a language as sophisticated as ours, but no tenses for past, present and future. The division does not exist. What does this say about time?
(*Sexing the Cherry* 8)³

This section posits that the relationship between past and present in *Sexing the Cherry* is represented as fluid; these time-frames are not separate but are echoed throughout the text. Through the use of so-called flash-backs, present-day Jordan and the Dog Woman connect to their seventeenth-century versions; simultaneously, these seventeenth-century protagonists occasionally envision their future versions. In this manner, Winterson disrupts the laws of physics: even time itself is scrutinised and bent.

Sexing the Cherry has a dual narrative pattern. There is Jordan, a pensive boy who likes to travel (like most of Winterson's characters, he loves journeys over water), and who often reflects on the nature of time, the structure of reality and on the new scientific theories that emerge in his seventeenth-century world. Like his narrative counterpart, the Dog-Woman, who adopts him when she finds him somewhere on the banks of the river Thames, he is presented not only in a seventeenth-century setting, but is also placed in late twentieth-century capitalist society. The novel is set predominantly in the seventeenth-century; only the final thirty pages of the novels are largely set in present-day London. The Dog-Woman is a woman of outrageous proportion. She is



Fig. 1. Symbol on opening page of the novel.

³ Winterson here refers to the "Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis," a theory of Linguistic Relativity, which is partially founded on Whorf's study of the Hopi Indians of Arizona. According to Whorf and his colleague Sapir, the Hopi language does not distinguish between past, present and future tenses, which would affect the manner in which the Hopi relate to the concept of time. According to their study, people perceive, think, and say what their language allows them to do. However, the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis has been heavily criticised for its problematic idea of causality, as well as its methods: it is stated that Whorf never met an actual Indian, so his assessments of their character must be somewhat vague. Furthermore, his translations of Hopi sentences were done to seem as different as possible, to emphasise the Hopi's different system of thought.

ugly, covered in dirt, and smells terrible. The significance of her physique is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.1 below. Other important characters in the novel are the Twelve Dancing Princesses, one of whom is Fortunata (fortunate in Italian). The Dancing Princesses are kept in captivity, but at night, they fly out through the window, visiting a city where everyone dances. Fortunata is Jordan's soul-mate and functions as his guide to an alternative reality. Unhindered by principle or any natural law, she moves in wonderful worlds of fascinating magic.

The use of multiple narrators in *Sexing the Cherry* does not lead to confusion; clear markers are inserted to demarcate these parallel homodiegetic narrations.⁴ The narration of the Dog-Woman, Jordan and the Twelve Dancing Princesses are marked through images of fruit in the text. Thus, through specific lay-out methods of the 1996 Vintage edition of *Sexing the Cherry*, it is easy to tell which character is speaking in the novel. The use of symbols is consistent throughout the novel, and carries specific reference to events; subsequently, the choice of fruits for the two main narrators is not random. The symbol employed for the Dog-Woman is a banana: a whole one in the



Fig. 2. Symbol of a whole banana.

seventeenth-century section of the novel (Fig. 2.), and a banana which has been sliced in half in the present-day section (Fig. 3.). It could be stated that the Dog-Woman's narration is symbolised by the image of a banana because it is



Fig. 3. Symbol of a sliced banana.

the first "edible fruit of the like never seen in England" (11) that she sets her eyes upon. She is quite taken aback by the sight of this fruit, as she describes it as "nothing more than the private parts of an Oriental. It was yellow and livid and long" (12). She dismisses the banana as something inedible by stating that "we had not gone to church all these years and been washed in the blood of Jesus only to eat ourselves up the way the Heathen do" (13). The connection the Dog-Woman makes between a banana and a penis occurs again in the novel when she is asked to perform oral sex on a man. The Dog-Woman is quite unsure as to what is requested of her, so the man explains: "'Put it in your mouth,' he said. 'Yes, as you would a delicious thing to eat'" (41). The Dog-Woman takes up his suggestion by subsequently

⁴ Here, Genette's narratological terms are followed. Genette uses "homodiegetic" when the narrator is present as a character in the story she/he relates.

“swallowing it up entirely and biting it off with a snap” (41). The reason why the banana appears sliced in half in the present-day section of the novel is less obviously connected with actions in the text. One possible reading of this splitting of the fruit symbols in general, so not only of the Dog-Woman’s symbol, could be that it emphasises the theme of the present-day section of the novel: the splitting of time and the deconstruction of coherent subjectivity. The first time the cut banana appears is when the present-day version of the Dog-Woman describes her recurrent hallucinations: “I imagine I am huge, raw, a giant. [...] I have a sack such as kittens are drowned in and I stop off all over the world filling it up” (121). In her imagination, she wanders the corridors and conference buildings of multinational companies and monopolies where “men in suits are discussing how to deal with the problem of the Third World” (122). She ignores their screams and objections by picking them up and dropping them “into my sack, all screaming at once about calling their lawyers and who do I think I am and what about free speech and civil liberties” (122). Subsequently, the severed banana may refer to the present-day Dog-Woman’s disillusioned view of men and her acts of revenge against them, albeit imaginary. The symbol of the whole banana, deployed for the narration set in the seventeenth-century, may then represent the Dog-Woman’s naïve attitude towards men.



Fig. 4. Symbol of a pineapple.

the symbol of a pineapple is used (Fig. 4.). As the Dog-Woman’s banana, it is sliced in half in the last section of the novel, set in the present-day (Fig. 5.). The image of a pineapple is used because this fruit is the first object that Jordan takes back to England, as he is accepted as



Fig. 5. Symbol of a sliced pineapple.

an apprentice on John Tradescant’s ship. Tradescant is a historical explorer who brought botanical wonders back for the scrutiny of Charles I. The arrival of the pineapple in London is narrated by the Dog-Woman: “Jordan carried it in his arms as though it were a yellow baby” (104). In this passage, a specific reference is made to slicing a pineapple in half: “with the wisdom of Solomon he [Jordan] prepared to slice it in two” (104). However, this slicing occurs in the seventeenth-century context

and hence does not specifically provide a reason why the symbol of a sliced pineapple is used for Jordan's present-day narrations. A reference to a pineapple recurs in the present-day section of the novel, when Nicholas Jordan (Jordan's present-day name) tries to imagine "what it would be like to bring something home for the first time" (113). He tries "to look at a pineapple and pretend I'd never seen one before" (113); he does not succeed, though, as he muses: "there's so little wonder left in the world because we've seen everything one way or another" (113). Nicholas keeps the pineapple in his room until it rots; hence, the symbol of the cut pineapple in Nicholas Jordan's present-day narration may refer to this rotting, disrupted pineapple.

Particularly striking is the lay-out used for the Twelve Dancing Princesses: they are identified and positioned almost as a story within a story. A separate, internal title-page presents "The *Story* of the Twelve Dancing Princesses" [emphasis mine], hence framed as a story-within-a-story. This page depicts angel-like creatures flying from an open window (Fig. 6.). Subsequently, each one of the Princesses' tales is illustrated with a small flying female figure with long hair and wavy dress (Fig. 7.). The significance of these symbols



Fig. 6. Image of internal title page, on page 45.

used for the Twelve Dancing Princesses and how this relates to their body-representations in the text is found in chapter 3.2 below.



Fig. 7. Symbol of flying figure

Additionally, the shift from the seventeenth-century section of the novel to the present-day part is made visible through another separate internal title page, carrying the somewhat ironic title "Some years later"



Fig. 8. Image of internal title page, on page 111.

featuring a drawing of a boat tackling high waves amidst a starry sky at night (Fig. 8.). This irony in the naming of the title page lies in the way the passing of time is phrased: not just *some* years have passed, but, to be more accurate, almost three centuries of time and historical developments lie between the first part and second part of the novel.

One of the main concerns of *Sexing the Cherry* is the nature of time. The whole structure of the novel is built on two parallel story lines that jointly seem to challenge the five statements about time quoted below, which are, importantly, all preceded by the word "lies:"

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

Lies 2: Time is a straight line.

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

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

Lies 5: Any proposition that contains the word 'finite' (the world, the universe, experience, ourselves ...) (83)⁵

Winterson here deconstructs the traditional Western conception of time which is laden with linearity, rationality and objectivity. This traditional notion of time Winterson instead exchanges with "the new Einsteinian concept of time as relative" (González 282), which not only affects the way the main narrators reflect on time, but also their relationship with history.

The fluid conception of time that Winterson displays in *Sexing the Cherry* is imbued with the possibility of time travel.⁶ As Jordan explains: "Time has no meaning, space and place have no meaning, on this journey. All times can be inhabited, all places visited" (80). Onboard Tradescant's ship, Jordan reflects on the nature of time and space and views both as mutable, when stating that "some people who have never crossed the land they were born on have travelled all over the world" (80). As was mentioned above, the final section of the novel entitled "Some Years Later," plays with readers' expectations of time. The reader would expect a leap forward in time of just some years; instead, the last section of the novel is set three centuries onwards. Although at first the reader is led to believe that the story is still set in the seventeenth century, as the opening paragraph mentions explorers offering pineapples to a king, it is soon apparent that Jordan has been transported to the late twentieth century, complete with newspapers and television, *Playboy* and computer hackers. But Nicholas Jordan still

⁵ Additionally, this list is concluded with two more "lies", which are connected not to the nature of time but to that of reality: "Lies 6: Reality as something which can be agreed upon." and "Lies 7: Reality as truth." (83).

⁶ The movement back and forth through time and space displayed in *Sexing the Cherry* is a practice that Paul Ricoeur sees as a vital element in story-telling; narrative and time together constitute a "healthy circle" (76), "an endless spiral that [carries] the meditation past the same point a number of times, but at different altitudes" (72).

portrays similar characteristics to those of his seventeenth-century counterpart Jordan: present-day Nicholas Jordan wonders where the pineapple he bought came from and he has retained his passion for ships:

I tried to look at a *pineapple* and pretend I'd never seen one before. I couldn't do it. There's so little wonder left in the world because we've seen everything one way or another. Where had that pineapple come from? Barbados was easy to find out, but who had brought it, and under what circumstances, and why? (113, emphasis mine)

The final section of the novel entitled "Some Years Later," contains the stories of naval officer Nicholas Jordan and an unnamed ecologist/feminist. These stories, described by Lisa Moore as "brief exercises in Post-Einsteinian physics and post-Saussurean philosophy" (118), theorise the underlying assumptions of *Sexing the Cherry*, namely the deconstruction of modern certainties about linear time and the relation of time to identity:

Thinking about time is to acknowledge two contradictory certainties: that our outward lives are governed by the seasons and the clock; that our inward lives are governed by something much less regular – an imaginative impulse cutting through the dictates of daily time, and leaving us free to ignore the boundaries of the here and now and pass like lightening along the coil of pure time, that is, the circle of the universe and whatever it does or does not contain. [...] Until now religion has described it better than science, but now physics and metaphysics appear to be saying the same thing. (89-90)

In this particular passage, Winterson connects discourses of religion, philosophy and science which question the unity of identity. Notably, in the passage above, Jordan reflects on the difference he experiences between internal time and external time: the former is characterised by its freedom and movement, the latter by its restrictive, defined or technologically-mediated nature.

In *Sexing the Cherry*, Winterson inserts philosophical passages that are not uttered by any of the characters and which, seemingly, do not fit in the narrative. These passages are almost metafictional at times and, even though they are often unconnected fragments, they serve as philosophical foundations for the novel. A similar practice is found in *The Powerbook*, discussed in Chapter 2.2. Although it is not clear which of the characters expresses these reflections on time, it could be argued that they stem from seventeenth-

century Jordan, as they connect with his philosophical frame of time. The section named "*Time 1*" (82, original typography) features Nicolas Jordan, the present-day version of seventeenth-century Jordan, as he is spoken to as though he were still in the seventeenth-century. Nicholas Jordan is confused when he hears that "they are burying the King at Windsor" (82), as he "knows of no King, only a Queen, who is far from being dead" (82). Notably, this passage is part of the seventeenth-century section of *The PowerBook*, which underlines the way in which Winterson represents the relationship between past and present as fluid; these time-frames are not separate but are echoed throughout the text. A similar practice of blurring the boundaries between past and present is found in the next passage concerning Jordan's reflections on time. Remarkably, the excerpt quoted below not only narrates events which take place three centuries later, but which concern the present-day version of the Dog-Woman, the unnamed ecologist/feminist:

Time 2: They are cat-calling the girl as she comes out of school. She hates them she wants to kill them, they tell her she smells, that she's too fat, too tall. She walks home along the river bank to a council flat in Upper Thames Street. The traffic deafens her. She climbs the steps at Waterloo Bridge to look at St Paul's glinting in the evening. She can't see St Paul's. All she can see is a row of wooden stakes and uncertain craft bobbing in the water. She can't hear the traffic any more, the roar of dogs is deafening. Coming to herself, she kicks the bunch of hounds and drags her blanket shawl closer to her. For a moment she felt dizzy, lost her balance, but no, she's home as always. She can see her hut. She laughs and the wind blows through her teeth. Jordan will be waiting for her. She doesn't have to see him to know he's there. (82)

In this passage, the present-day Dog-Woman perceives images which belong to her seventeenth-century counterpart, and which do not fit in her time-frame. The uncertain craft can be said to refer to Tradescant's ship in which Jordan set sail, and the hounds remind of the seventeenth-century Dog-Woman's loyal accompaniment. The excerpt quoted above, is in turn echoed in one of the present-day Dog-Woman's narrations, which is positioned in the last section of the novel. In this way, Winterson not only draws parallels between the characters but also between past and present, as the present-day characters experience flash-backs belonging to the world of their seventeenth-century counterparts:

I have a memory of a time when I was a schoolgirl and getting fatter by the day. At that time we lived in a council flat on Upper Thames Street in London, by the river. [...] I was walking

home from school by myself. [...] I didn't want to go home. I wanted to stay out all night and make a bed by the river and light a fire. I climbed up the steps at Waterloo Bridge and ignored the racing traffic so I could look out on either side at St Paul's and Westminster. [...] I looked at my forearms resting on the wall. They were massive, like thighs, but there was no wall, just a wooden spit, and when I turned in the opposite direction I couldn't see the dome of St Paul's. I could see rickety vegetable boats and women arguing with one another and a regiment or horseback crossing the Thames. I had to get to Blackfriars, there was someone waiting for me. Who? Who? Now I wake up in the night shouting "Who? Who?" like an owl. Why does that day return and return as I sit by a rotting river with only a fire for company? (128)

This similar method is repeated, albeit now between present-day Nicholas Jordan and his seventeenth-century version Jordan. Nicholas Jordan is accepted at the Navy and one of his first assignments is to investigate a mine. In this passage he connects with his seventeenth-century counterpart:

I rested my arms on the railing and my head on my arms. I felt I was falling falling into a black hole with no stars and no life and no helmet. I heard a foot scrape on the deck beside me. Then a man's voice said, "They are burying the King at Windsor today." I snapped upright and looked full in the face of the man, who was staring out over the water. I knew him but from where? And his clothes... nobody wears clothes like that any more. [...] I heard a bird cry, sharp and fierce. Tradescant sighed. *My name is Jordan.* (121, emphasis mine)

Later, another of the philosophical passages of the novel, presumably connected to Jordan, asserts that "[t]he inward life tells us we are multiple, not single, and that our existence is really countless existences holding hands like those cut-out paper dolls, but unlike the dolls never coming to an end" (90). The emphasis here on the multiplicity of the self could be read as part of Winterson's critique of traditional definitions of identity. Such a critique is already clearly present in the first page of the novel, when Jordan comes upon himself in the fog and with his hands "trace[s] the lineaments of [his] own face" (9). Indeed, the very first sentence of the novel, "My name is Jordan" (9) might be seen initially as a statement of coherent identity and of the connection between individual and name. Yet when that same sentence is repeated much later in the text (125), it is no longer clear who is speaking, because any assumptions about transparent connections between narrative voice and name have been utterly undermined. The Dog-Woman introduces herself in the following way: "I had a name but I have forgotten it. They call me the Dog-Woman and it will do" (11). It is worth mentioning that the importance of naming is equally questioned in *The PowerBook* as argued in Chapters 2 and 4.1 below.

1.2 SHIFTING PERCEPTIONS TOWARD COUNTER-HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

The journey is not linear, it is always back and forth, denying the calendar, the wrinkles and lines of the body. The self is not contained in any moment or any place, but it is only in the intersection of moment and place that the self might, for a moment, be seen vanishing through a door, which disappears at once.
(Jordan in *Sexing the Cherry*, 80)

This section focuses on the manner in which the characters of *Sexing the Cherry* express their views pertaining to history and story-telling, following from the section above which focused on Winterson's methods to display multiple narrations, through the means of deploying an anti-linear concept of time, and setting the plot in multiple locations.

The dismissal of naming in *Sexing the Cherry* and its anti-linear view of time are mirrored in the way history is represented through the characters' narratives. The characters of the novel adhere to different principles concerning the way to narrate stories and history. This section explores which views of story-telling in general and of history in particular is expressed by the two main narrators. The Dog-Woman's narrative reflects traditional views of historical writing, such as linearity, objectivity and one singular point of view. This mode of historical narration is also inscribed on her body: it is large, heavy and down to earth, with all its connotations. Jordan, on the other hand, is characterised as fluid, as his name and circumstances of his birth connote, and signifies a new mode of thinking about history and narrating stories, in which the claim of objectivity is refuted and other ideals, such as *embodied* narration, are brought to the fore. In the novel, the tale of the Twelve Dancing Princesses functions as a unifying bridge to Jordan's and the Dog-Woman's modes of narration.

Jordan's narrations question the validity of historical writing and documentation, as he dismisses the value of writing travel journals. Simultaneously, Jordan highlights the

malleability of gender and sexual boundaries as he often dresses and identifies himself as a woman.⁷ Many reviewers, as Lisa Moore stresses, have “described this novel as another view on the story of the historical figure John Tradescant, the explorer who brought botanical wonders [...] back for the imperial scrutiny of Charles I” (116). In the novel, Jordan sets sail with his employer, John Tradescant, and undertakes a number of voyages. Exciting as these journeys may be, Jordan directs his attention to the places he *might* have visited, instead of focusing on the actual places he has encountered. Jordan begins the story of his colonial voyages by discounting the importance of these travels:

Every journey conceals another journey within its lines: the path not taken and the forgotten angle. These are the journeys I wish to record. Not the ones I made, but the ones I might have made, or perhaps did make in some other place or time. I could tell you the truth as you will find it in diaries and maps and log-books. I could faithfully describe all that I saw and heard and give you a travel book. [...] I discovered that my own life was written invisibly, was squashed between the facts, was flying without me [...] The longer I eluded myself the more obsessed I became with the thought of discovery. Occasionally, in company, someone would snap their fingers in front of my face and ask, ‘Where are you?’ For a long time I had no idea, but gradually I began to find evidence in the other life and gradually it appeared before me.
(9-10)

Not the famous journeys Jordan made with Tradescant, but the journeys he *might* have made are the subject of this novel. Jordan dismisses the print technologies of colonial supremacy, namely travel books, as he equally dismisses the facts that these early modern narratives contain. To Jordan, discovery lies not in finding strange fruits or reaching even stranger lands; instead he recounts a psychic or imaginative discovery of the *invisible* life. The reader is left somewhat in the dark, as Jordan does not distinguish between physical and psychic journeys, and, as a result, it is sometimes difficult to understand whether his journeys actually have taken place or whether they are figments of his imagination.

The retellings in *Sexing the Cherry* are pervaded with persistent refusals of the existence of a single truth. When Jordan finds the missing twelfth Dancing Princess, Fortunata, she tells him the story of her life. Jordan has heard this story before, from her eleven sisters; however, Jordan finds her version quite different from the one he has just heard.

⁷ The significance of Jordan crossing gender boundaries in *Sexing the Cherry* is elaborated on in Chapter 3.2 below.

In telling her story, Fortunata commences with narrating her wedding day and her escape from the church, and later describes the beginning of the story: the enchanted flying city, and its nightly anti-gravitational pull on the light-weight sisters, as well as their downfall on the night they were to make their home in the city and “drift through space forever” (99). Fortunata’s version of her flight from the church on the wedding day conflicts to such an extent with the story the sisters told Jordan that he questions her narrative:

“But the story they told me about you was not the same. That you escaped, yes, but that you flew away and walked on a wire stretched from the steeple of the church to the mast of a ship at anchor in the bay.” She laughed. How could such a thing be possible? “But,” I said, “How could it be possible to fly every night from the window to an enchanted city when there are no such places?” “Are there not such places?” she said, and I fell silent, not knowing how to answer. (95)

The novel opens with Jordan’s “This is the first thing I saw,” followed by a description of fog drifting toward and encompassing him (9), and Fortunata also begins her narrative with “This is the first thing I saw”, and describes a winter scene shortly before her wedding day (93). But, much later in the novel, Jordan begins to question Fortunata’s story and associates these first-seen elements with the “LIES” of “historicism:”

It was not the first thing she saw, how could it have been? Nor was the night in the fog-covered field the first thing I saw. But before then we were like those who dream and pass through life as a series of shadows. And so what we have told you is true although it is not. (95)

Jordan’s uncertainty about the truthfulness and validity of memory extends to a concept of time that cannot be understood in linear terms:

MEMORY I: The scene I have just described to you may lie in the future or the past. Either I have found Fortunata or I will find her. I cannot be sure. Either I am remembering her or I am still imagining her. But she is somewhere in the grid of time, a co-ordinate, as I am. (93)

Both Jordan and the Dog-Woman question the role memory plays in their identity-formation.⁸ Jordan even questions whether his childhood ever happened. Consequently,

⁸ Moore focuses on the function that the loss of memory plays in making sense of the world. She extends the reflections on memory in *Sexing the Cherry* by opposing Locke’s view of consciousness and its relation to memory with those ideas formulated by Nietzsche (125).

childhood, referred to by Moore as “that most sacred and naturalized of institutions of consciousness” (117), has a status of necessary fiction, as the following passage illustrates:

I will have to assume that I had a childhood, but I cannot assume to have the one I remember. Everyone remembers things which never happened. (92)

In *Sexing the Cherry*, memory and historical storytelling do not guarantee truth or authenticity, and it is precisely this lack of guaranteed truth that Jordan ascribes to the ambiguity of memory:

Did my childhood happen? I must believe it did, but I don't have any proof. My mother [the Dog-Woman] says it did, but she is a fantasist, a liar and a murderer, though none of that would stop me loving her. I remember things, but I too am a fantasist and a liar, though I have not killed anyone yet. [...] I will have to assume that I had a childhood, but I cannot assume to have had the one I remember. Everyone remembers things which never happened. And it is common knowledge that people often forget things which did. Either we are all fantasists and liars or the past has nothing definite in it. I have heard people say we are shaped by our childhood. But which one? (92)

The main concern of *Sexing the Cherry* is to challenge the univocal way of representing history. The novel oscillates between the narratives of Dog-Woman and Jordan, who challenges linear historicism by refusing to simply replace it with a singular and privileged narrative form. Jordan's questioning explorations of narrative, time and memory emphasise the impossibility of any true and totalising rendering of history.

In *Sexing the Cherry*, the act of revisiting history is an experience in writing that is closely linked to self-perception. The way Jordan narrates history, as a multilayered, poly-vocal and self-perceptive action, is reflective of the way many feminist theorists aim to challenge dominant historical discourses. Generally, these theorists claim that dominant discourses on history reproduce patriarchal values that discredit the knowledge and experiences of “other” voices. This univocal and totalising view of history is often represented by italicising the “his” in “*history*”. Winterson thus seems to dismiss *history* from the outset and claims for herself the right to dive into the past to write a separate world, in which subjectivity and emotion can multiply the possibilities of the actual world.

CHAPTER TWO STORY-TELLING IN THE POWERBOOK

2.1 JOURNEYS THROUGH SPACE AND TIME

The world is a mirror of the mind's abundance.
(*The PowerBook* 263)

Winterson's *The PowerBook* (2000) is set in several time-periods. The nature of time is conceived as fluid and anti-linear: a theme which is of equal primary importance in *Sexing the Cherry*. Where the narratives of *Sexing the Cherry* are set either in seventeenth-century or in present-day London, the narratives of *The PowerBook* cross even more diverse time-periods and locations. The narratives travel through geographical space and through time; each chapter is set in a different location and time from the one preceding it. *The PowerBook* comprises several stories situated in the virtual world of the Internet, the mythical world of Lancelot and Guinevere, and in modern-day, *offline* space, although the distinction between these worlds is not always clear. The book lacks a table of contents, but contains capitalised chapters reminiscent of an Apple Macintosh "MENU" that lists among other items "OPEN HARD DRIVE," "NEW DOCUMENT," "SEARCH" and "VIEW;" the other chapters' titles are set in lower case. The chapters presented in lower case are *not* connected with computer-actions: "virtual road" (71), "great and ruinous lovers" (87), "blame my parents" (153), and eight further chapters. Winterson deploys typographical methods to discern shifts in space and time in *The PowerBook*: a method which she also uses in *Sexing the Cherry*. Additionally, another instance of cross-fertilisation occurs between Winterson's two novels, as the narratives of *The PowerBook* do not consist of separate time-frames, but are echoed throughout the text.

The protagonist of *The PowerBook* is named in different ways: in the chapters set in twentieth-century London, the name Ali is used as a nickname, whereas the given name of the character is Alix. In the chapter entitled "OPEN HARD DRIVE" (7, original

typography) a different protagonist is called Ali as well, but this is the only name this female character uses. This particular chapter is set in the sixteenth-century, and recounts Ali's experiences whilst travelling to Holland from Turkey by ship. To avoid confusion between the twentieth-century narrator and the sixteenth-century one, the former character will be named Ali/Alix and the latter will be named Ali. The reason for using the slash to signify the twentieth-century character Ali/Alix, is explained below.

Ali/Alix is an e-writer who stages her/himself in various stories as a person balancing truth and untruth, fact and fiction. The gender of this narrator remains unspecified throughout the novel, which is why Ali/Alix is referred to as she/he or he/she; similarly, her/his or his/her are used as personal determiners. The book is open-ended, allowing the reader to choose whether Ali/Alix and his/her lover separate or not. Notably, this choice in ending is not as free as it may seem, as, earlier in the novel, the reader is warned that all love stories and great romances have only three possible ways to conclude: either in revenge, tragedy, or forgiveness (89). At the outset of the narrative, the reader is acquainted with the protagonist Ali/Alix, the e-fiction writer. The Turkish sixteenth-century character Ali, who smuggles the first tulip bulbs to Holland, is echoed in the twentieth-century Londoner Ali/Alix, who tailors e-stories to her/his customers' wishes. The ease with which the characters of *The PowerBook* travel through time and space, is regarded as a feature which is deeply specific to cyberspace. However, similar shifts in time and space occur in *Sexing the Cherry*, which does not contain references to cyberspace.

The nature of time is displayed and subsequently displaced in the plot of *The PowerBook*. The novel presents multiple narratives, shifts in geographical locations, alternating time-frames, as well as passages reflecting on the activity of writing, which as a whole occasionally displace and confuse the reader. The "MENU" of the novel features a total of twenty-five chapters. Fourteen of these chapters are capitalised, whereas the other eleven titles are written in lower case. Seemingly insignificant, this specific use of alternating lower case and capitalised typography produces meaning: it is not random.

The PowerBook contains multiple references to the time of day in which the narration takes place. The first chapter introduces the main protagonist, Ali/Alix, who earns a living as a “language costumier”, as the title of the chapter suggests. He/she writes predominantly during the night: “It’s night. I’m sitting at my screen” (3). The word “night” opens multiple chapters (29, 73, 95, 141, 155, 189, 247, and 277) and on every occasion this word is followed by a full stop, and either followed by descriptions of activities pertaining to computer programmes, such as opening an email (3), logging on to the Net (73), or using a search engine (95), or, on other instances, the word “night” is followed by a reference to a computer component, namely its screen (3, 29, 141, 189, and 247). Only on one occasion the word “night” is not followed by a computer-based action or component. In the final chapter of the novel, “SAVE”, the word “night” is followed by a description of Ali/Alix’ surroundings, instead of being followed by a computer-based action:

Night.

I’m at home in Spitalfields. I live above the shop. The sign on the shop just says VERDE and no one can see inside. The big windows in their old wooden frames have blinds pulled down over the lower panes. The clock ticks, but only in time. There are shadows on the ceiling – a bear’s head, a knife. (277, original typography)

The title of this chapter, “SAVE”, may refer to Ali/Alix’ e-stories being finalised: this is the closing chapter of the novel. This chapter saves the written proceedings of the night, and the narrative as a whole, after having previously “QUIT?” (249), “REALLY QUIT?” (257) and, subsequently, to “RESTART” (265) the computer, to allow one final story to be written. When the laptop is no longer the main focus for Ali/Alix, her/his narrations, for the first time, centre on his/her surroundings, which feature shadows of uncommon objects, such as a bear’s head and a knife. Time is described as following its regular course of practice, namely ticking in time. This regularity of time is counteracted in the novel by the numerous references to time as something which “returns everything, changes everything” (286).

The reference to a shop named “VERDE” (277), in the passage quoted above, may be connected to one of the author’s own ventures: Winterson’s Italian delicatessen shop

named Verde's at Spitalfields Market in London. On her official website, Winterson describes her motivation behind it:

My shop isn't going to worry Tesco, and I won't change the eating habits of Britain, though I'd like to try. What I am doing is using the opportunities available to me to make a difference, however small, and to put my money where my mouth is. Anyway, when I walk down my street at night and I see my neighbours getting their supper from Verde's, and I hear Harvey talking about his home-made pumpkin pasta and his hand-made Parmesan, I know I am not crazy. There is more to life than living it as quickly and as cheaply as possible. To me, that's not living life at all.

The centrality of food in daily life, as well as the erotic elements connected with eating it, is a prominent feature in *The PowerBook*. As Ali/Alix eats an artichoke at a restaurant in Paris, he/she starts to "peel it away, fold by fold, layer by layer, dipping it", and adds to this erotic description of eating artichokes, by saying that "there is no secret about eating artichoke, or what the act resembles" (57). The opening "MENU" is repeated as a food menu: an Italian recipe for "SALSA DI POMODORI" (215, original typography), which would automatically produce a great taste, as Ali/Alix states that "food tastes better in Italian" anyway (216). This analogy of the menu is repeated later in the chapter, but this time it contains people:

Take two people. Slice lengthways. Boil with the lid on. Add a marriage, a past, another woman. Sugar to taste. Pass through a chance meeting. Lubricate sparingly. Serve on a bed of – or is it in a bed of – ? Use fresh and top with raw emotion. (217, original typography)

In this particular passage, Winterson blends two different types of discourse, namely that of cooking and that of relationships, to construct a humorously summarised description of Ali/Alix' own affair with her/his married lover. Moreover, Winterson connects the computer-based title of the "MENU" of the novel with the *offline* activity of cooking. Thus, Winterson displaces time and space: the "MENU" is not positioned in any particular time or space, whereas the activity of cooking follows a real-time order of events.

As was mentioned above, the narrative structure of *The PowerBook* jumps in time and in location from chapter to chapter. The transitions in temporal and geographical settings are abrupt and are not signalled in the text by the use of connecting passages at the end

of each chapter, or through internal sub-titles introducing the new setting. In *The PowerBook* the reader is left to interpret the narrative setting her/himself. However, the use of either upper-case or capitalised chapter titles provides a clue to the structure of the novel. These seemingly insignificant typographical details produce meaning in the narrative structure and provide the reader with a much-needed point of reference through this novel. One possible reading of Winterson's typographical method is that the lower-case chapters narrate Ali/Alix real-life, unmediated, here-and-now: his/her actions and experiences set in "meatspace" (187, 189). The word "meatspace" occurs twice in the novel: once as the title of a chapter, and once in a virtual communication between Ali/Alix and his/her client/lover. To the question "Where do you live?" Ali/Alix responds that she has his/her Website, implying that a virtual address should be sufficient. Ali/Alix' lover is dissatisfied with this answer, and makes clear that she wants Ali/Alix' "Meatspace not cyberspace" (189) address. Thus, the difference between real-life experiences and those taking place in cyberspace is connected to embodiment: meatspace is the space where the flesh is, unmediated by technology which renders the flesh invisible.

Alternatively, the capitalised chapters constitute Ali/Alix' electronic stories, written on demand for her/his client. The e-stories in the capitalised chapters are set in various (historical) periods and locations and they occasionally incorporate references to historical figures or appropriate characters from medieval literature or antiquity. Subsequently, the plot jumps from sixteenth-century Turkey to contemporary Paris. In the first e-story, named "OPEN HARD DRIVE", the reader is presented, as is Ali/Alix' client, with Ali/Alix' first e-story, featuring the distribution of tulip bulbs. Thus, the title of the chapter forecloses its contents: as the hard drive, running on an Apple Mackintosh operating system, is opened, the resources of the computer are made visible, and a programme, such as a word-processing programme, can be started.

Following from sixteenth-century Turkey, the narrative proceeds to recount the Arthurian legend of Lancelot and Guinevere and their passionate love-story, naturally, with a twist, which is in turn followed by a sun-kissed encounter between Ali/Alix and

her/his lover in present-day Capri, Italy. This dizzying journey continues with the “story of Francesca da Rimini and her lover Paolo” (145). This story can be found in other sources, as Winterson tells the reader: “You can find it in Boccaccio. You can find it in Dante. You can find it here” (145). Winterson explicitly identifies the intertextual references she deploys in the novel, by naming the original authors of the tales.

After this fourteenth-century Italian love-story, the destination of the next capitalised chapter, “EMPTY TRASH” (157), deals with Alix’ adoption story and her/his parents in “Muck House” (160). In this chapter, the narrator Alix explains the origin of his/her name: “My parents called me Alix because they wanted a name with an X in it, because X marks the spot” (161). In this case, the X is an important symbolic marker of written consent, as the reader has learnt that Alix’ adoptive father is illiterate. Moreover, “reading and writing were both forbidden” (162) at their house; Alix’ “mother could do both” but her/his father neither. As a result, both reading and writing were deemed to have “no value” (162) and were forbidden. Only at this point in the narrative, when the case of the X is described, does the reader understand why in the opening pages, when e-fiction writer and client connect in virtual space for the first time, Ali/Alix says to his/her client that she may:

‘Call me Ali.’
‘Is that your real name?’
‘Real enough.’ (30)

Supposedly, to her/him, in a virtual world, the act of naming is irrelevant: “Ali” is a “real enough” name, presumably because it is her/his so-called online nickname. Later in the narrative, it is stated that her/his client’s nickname is “Tulip”. In this particular case, naming *is* relevant: the plot of the e-story that Ali/Alix writes for his/her client evolves around tulips. Thus, story-telling is a practice that involves naming, however arbitrary these names may be. That names fail to represent a person’s identity is also expressed by the Dog-Woman in *Sexing the Cherry*: “I had a name but I have forgotten it. They call me the Dog-Woman and it will do” (11). In the “EMPTY TRASH” chapter,

additionally, a clear connection exists between its title and its contents: Alix describes her/his adoptive parents as “a man and a woman who owned a Muck Midden” (159), a dung-heap. Further in this chapter, Alix asks her mother whether a world exists beyond their house, to which she answers: “‘Nothing but waste and scrap. The earth itself is nothing but a collection of belched rocks and burning gases. We live in a cosmic dustbin’” (165). The title “EMPTY TRASH” hence aptly covers the contents of the chapter.

“SPECIAL”, the next e-story in Ali/Alix’ chain of production is concerned with the story of George Mallory, the historical Everest mountaineer who lost his life in 1924 while on his third expedition. This story, told in third-person, maps Mallory’s concerns and experiences whilst tackling the highest and most perilous mountain of the world. The conclusion of this story focuses on the last moments before his fatal fall:

In his inside pocket, frozen against his heart, was his last letter from his wife.
Unfold it. Read it. She loves him. She wants him to come home. His children miss him. The garden is lovely.
Her eyes are dark. His are pale. (179, original typography)

The themes of unfolding, opening and reading recur throughout *The PowerBook*. Ali/Alix, in a similar way, treats her emails as letters waiting to be opened, as she/he states in the opening page of the novel: “I’m sitting at my screen. There’s an email for me. I unwrap it” (3). The story of mountaineer Mallory does not end yet, as Ali/Alix transports the chain of events to the present day, by focusing on the group of mountaineers who found his body in 1999:

Mallory fell. We don’t know how. He was found in the self-arrest position with a broken body and closed eyes. His broken watch was in his pocket.
There was no more time. (179)

The image of time recurs in the shape of a broken watch which can no longer track the passing of time. Not only does the watch fail to keep the time, but for Mallory time is non-existent and irrelevant. The chapter entitled “CHOOSER” (233) also addresses the malleable nature of time, as the chapter closes with a detailed account of the passing of time: “there’s a time when time is so still it stops” (243), and “then the clock is ticking

again, but we're together" (244). That the notion of time is also deeply embodied is stated in "VIEW", when Ali/Alix ponders: "Time is downloaded into our bodies. We contain it" (121).

If the reader is not yet dizzy at this point in the novel, in "QUIT?" she/he certainly will be after being whisked back to the sixteenth-century, to reconnect with Ali in Turkey, whose practice of gender-swapping by donning tulip bulbs and a stem "soon spread" (251). The narration does not quite conclude yet, as "REALLY QUIT?" lies at the turn of the page; ready to jump back in time some more years, namely to 1460 when Giovanni da Casto, "godson of Pope Pius II, returned to Italy from the Levant" (259). When turning the page after this brief venture into the fifteenth-century, unexpectedly a single sentence appears. It is not preceded by a title, and unlike the other text of the novel, it is printed in bold letters; it reads: "The world is a mirror of the mind's abundance" (263, original typography). This single sentence is followed by the final chapter of the novel, "SAVE", in which Ali/Alix commences yet another story, this time retelling the story of Orlando⁹ and Astolfo, well-known literary characters stemming from the fantastic *Orlando* epic poems.¹⁰ The final section of the novel again features a computer-screen which now "had dimmed" (285). This section explains the time-frame and location of events: "A couple of years ago I went down to the Thames at the lowest tide of the century. 19 January 1998" (285), and thus marks yet another

⁹ It is noteworthy that DeLombard, in her review article on *The PowerBook*, has a different perception of the source of this character. She views Winterson's Orlando as stemming from her life-long passion for Virginia Woolf's literary legacy. She states that: "Jeanette Winterson's filiation to Virginia Woolf has been well-documented in comparisons of her earlier work to that of the Bloomsbury grand-dame. How appropriate, then that Winterson [...] should appropriate her predecessor's *Orlando* – which tracks the eponymous through a multiplicity of ages, identities, and loves – in her new novel" (24).

¹⁰ *Orlando Furioso* was written by Ludovico Ariosto in 1516; Matteo Maria Boiardo is credited as the author of *Orlando Innamorato*, dating from 1528. The fabulous and fantastic stories of *Orlando* are worthy of recounting; though a representative and comprehensive summary of the novels' turbulent plots is impossible to give in such a limited space of a footnote. However, a shorter summary of the plot could be as follows: Orlando finds Astolfo in the stomach of a whale, where he has been banished to as a punishment for kidnapping his servant's wife. Astolfo is the trusty companion of Orlando, who loses his sanity, which Astolfo aims to retrieve. Astolfo travels through London and France, and travels on to Egypt after having calmed down a hippogryph. He ends up at the gates of hell where someone tells him a love-story. The subsequent events take place in the Garden of Eden and then shift to the surface of the moon, where the most well-known section of the novel takes place. On the moon, Astolfo finds all items which have been lost on the Earth; Orlando's sanity is among these items, contained in a small glass bottle. In the end, Astolfo returns Orlando's sanity. I would like to thank Domitilla Olivieri for sharing her insights and personal recollections of these amazing Italian epic poems.

shift in time and location. The final sentences, it could be argued, sum up the key focus of the novel: the immense power of love which defeats time, as they read:

I took off my watch and dropped it into the water.
Time take it.
Your face, your hands, the movement of your body...
Your body is my Book of Hours.
Open it. Read it.
This is the true history of the world. (298)

The narrator no longer requires the use of his/her watch, as love directs the rhythm of time, instead of the clock. The true history of the world can be read in his/her lover's body, which is compared to the "Book of Hours", the main prayer book used in medieval Europe. Ali/Alix' way of narrating stories is thus deeply rooted in the body of her/his lover, and defeats linear time as directed by clocks.

The lower case chapters in *The PowerBook* are not reminiscent of computer-actions, whereas the capitalised chapters are. These lower case chapters have been defined above as Ali/Alix' real-life, unmediated, here-and-now, detailing his/her actions and experiences set in "meatspace" (187, 189). Not all chapters with lower case titles open with the word "night". Notably three of the eleven lower-case chapters open differently. The chapter named "great and ruinous lovers" (89) opens with a list of great, thwarted, lovers, thus echoing the title of this chapter. The list includes lovers from various literary sources and historical periods, thereby stressing that great love stories are of all times and places. Thus, Winterson can be said to refute the boundaries of temporal and spatial locations, as well as various literary sources, by creating this list:

Lancelot and Guinevere.
Tristan and Isolde.
Siegfried and Brünnhilde.
Romeo and Juliet.
Cathy and Heathcliffe.
Vita and Violet.
Oscar and Bosie.
Burton and Taylor.
Abelard and Heloise.
Paolo and Francesca. (89, original typology)

That this is a subjective list of the great, thwarted, lovers of all times is made explicit by Ali/Alix him/herself: "There are many more. This is a list that you can write yourself" (89). That great love stories are not only of a heterosexual nature, but also of a homosexual nature is made explicit with Winterson's inclusion of the relationship between Oscar and Bosie. The chapter entitled "own hero" (181) displays Ali/Alix reflecting on the day he/she was born and how her/his birth was immediately connected with the notion of time. The moment her/his mother gave birth to him/her, she/he was marked by time, signifying his/her entrance into the world. Before Ali/Alix was born, it felt as a "brief eternity waiting for time to begin" (185): the period she/he spent in his/her mother's womb was timeless, simply because there were no clocks. But immediately at the moment of being born, "time tumbled me out, cut me loose, and set the clock – RUN! RUN!" (185, original typography). Winterson turns time into an active agent by representing it as the source of a baby's delivery.

Occasionally, the reader is displaced and confused by the use of multiple narratives, shifts in geographical locations, alternating time-frames, passages referring to the fluid nature of time, as well as passages reflecting on the activity of writing in *The PowerBook*. However, the lay-out and typography of the novel can provide the reader with much-needed references. As can be seen from the capitalised contents of the novel alone, the use of new technologies is a crucial aspect in this novel. Which effects this technology produces in the novel and which strategies and conventions it uses and/or deconstructs is the focus of the following section.

2.2 NOT ONE BUT MANY: MULTIPLYING NARRATIVES

"What happened to the omniscient author?"
"Gone interactive." (31)

The lay-out and typography of the novel can provide the reader of *The PowerBook* with much-needed references, as the novel uses multiple narratives, shifts in geographical locations, alternating time-frames, passages referring to the fluid nature of time, as well as passages reflecting on the activity of writing in *The PowerBook*. In the novel, the use of new technologies is a crucial aspect.

The PowerBook includes a total of twenty-five chapters which, at first glance, do not appear to be connected. However, these multiple narratives are closely linked in their themes, even if they are set in different times and locations. Most chapters feature references to the mutability of time, and address the question of whether the notion of time is important to the way stories are narrated. It can be stated that the use of new technologies is a crucial aspect in this novel, as the titles of the chapters are reminiscent of an Apple Macintosh "MENU". That these titles refer to those solely of Apple Macintosh operating systems and not to those based on other operating systems, such as Windows, Linux or UNIX is made explicit in the title of the novel: the PowerBook is a line of Apple Mac laptops sold from 1991 to 2006. Ali/Alix' role as a cyber-tale spinner, writing on demand for her/his clients, produces multiple narratives. Ali/Alix states that her/his world of e-fiction is situated in "a virtual world. This is a world inventing itself" (73), and that he/she is "looking for the meaning inside the data" (74). This section analyses which effects the use of technological metaphors produces in the novel. It explores which strategies and conventions are used and/or deconstructed in the novel.

In *The PowerBook*, Winterson inserts philosophical passages that are not uttered by any of the characters and which, seemingly, do not fit into the narrative. This practice is also found in *Sexing the Cherry*. In the chapter of *The PowerBook* entitled "NEW DOCUMENT," one such seemingly disconnected passages is found, which elaborates

on the mechanics of writing and foregrounds “the danger of automatic writing”. The narrator of this excerpt is, as in other metafictional philosophical explorations in the novel, difficult to ascertain; however, certain elements in this chapter point towards the e-fiction writer Ali/Alix as she/he writes a new story, commissioned by his/her married lover:

There is always the danger of automatic writing. The danger of writing yourself towards an ending that need never be told. At a certain point the story gathers momentum. It convinces itself, and does its best to convince you, that the end in sight is the only possible outcome. There is a fatefulness and a loss of control that are somehow confronting. This was your script, but now it writes itself. Stop. Break the narrative. Refuse all the stories that have been told so far (because that is what the momentum really is), and try to tell the story differently – in a different style, with different weights – and allow some air to those elements choked with centuries of use, and give us some substance to the floating world. (62-63)

Interestingly, this passage concerns the dangers connected not with writing and story-telling in general, but those pertaining to the ending of a particular narrative. The conclusion of any particular story, Winterson suggests, takes on a life of its own and tempts the writer into thinking this is the only possible ending. The only way for a writer to avoid lapsing into repetition by using “elements choked with centuries of use” is awareness of the stories which have been told before and subsequently denying these narratives. Telling the story in a different way is presented as true literary innovation.

Many elements in *The PowerBook* refer to traditional narrative patterns of print fiction and writing. The novel is in this way a blend of the old and the new, as it draws on the digital, cyberspace, in an analog container: print fiction. The novel presents technologically-mediated practices and reflections pertaining to story-telling in the shape of a book, and an integral part of the plot of the novel evolves around electronic fiction. Similarly, this blend of old and new mechanisms is echoed in the fact that Ali/Alix meets his/her client in the flesh as well as online. The novel does not elaborate on the difference between meeting in real life and in cyberspace. To communicate virtually, via encoded and decoded circuits of a computer and its software, is not perceived as different from real life contact. In *The PowerBook* Winterson blends references to computer technology and the internet with the fleshiness of real-life

bodies. The novel appears to suggest that in the digital age the materiality of the body does not simply disappear. It remains a crucial signifier of experience and subjectivity.

In *The PowerBook* Winterson draws attention to the material construction of the novel itself as a work of print fiction. She does this by numbering only the right-facing pages of the novel: the left-facing pages are not. The novel thus disrupts the dominant way of book design, which entails numbering all pages, instead of showing only the odd numbers. The possible ways of making the material construction of a novel as a printed medium explicit are infinite, as N. Katherine Hayles' 2002 novel *Writing Machines* shows. The primary significance of *Writing Machines* lies in the relationship between its material design and its argument for material criticism. The design of the book not only embodies, but enables its argument. For example, all quotations appear as images of the



Fig. 9. Scan of pages 56 and 57. *Writing Machines*

texts from which they were extracted, rather than as continuous typescript (Fig. 9.). Additionally, important passages are emphasised by imaging them as "bubble" text seen through a convex lens (Fig. 10.). On the table of contents page, vertical lines are printed which represent the page

edges imaged as if one were looking at the book from the side. The number and density of the lines provide a visual map to the position in the book, with line thickness correlating with chapter length (Fig. 9. and Fig. 10.). Lastly, the actual edges of the book contain abstract black marks which when read together in one direction say "WRITING" and in the other direction "MACHINES", which emphasises the cumulative

edges imaged as if one were looking at the book from the side. The number and density of the lines provide a visual map to the position in the book, with line thickness correlating with chapter length (Fig. 9. and Fig. 10.). Lastly, the actual edges of the book contain abstract black marks which when read together in one direction say "WRITING" and in the other direction "MACHINES", which emphasises the cumulative



Fig. 10. Scan of pages 24 and 25. *Writing Machines*.

effect of the individual pages in creating a whole. This book does not have footnotes or a bibliography contained within it, but rather, this information is displayed on a website, namely <http://mitpress.mit.edu/mediawork>, which further distinguishes the book from traditional scholarly books. Hayles expresses “lingering regret” about this separation of footnote and bibliography from the book (“Author’s Acknowledgement” 143).

In *Writing Machines*, Hayles first puts into practice what she later theorises in her most recent book *My Mother Was A Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts* (2005): the importance of media-specific analysis (MSA). This concept of MSA is a highly valuable and productive analytical tool to understand the way the material construction of *The PowerBook* produces knowledge. It is precisely this method of analysis that makes it possible to argue that *The PowerBook* is an innovative work of fiction, because the novel interconnects references to literary characters, real-life bodies, and the virtual world of cyberspace. Additionally, its innovation lies in the way it draws attention to how books are commonly laid-out by subverting these methods. Understanding literature as the interplay between form and medium, MSA insists that texts must always be embodied to exist in the world. Hayles argues that digital media provide an opportunity to see print with new eyes and, with that chance, the possibility of understanding how deeply literary theory and criticism have been permeated with assumptions specific to print.

As was mentioned above, it is uncertain whether Winterson herself used a PowerBook to write her novel. However, a distinct clue is found on the last printed and unnumbered page of the novel, which certainly proposes a link between the title and the textual processing device. It reads:

A NOTE ON THE TYPE

This book was set in Minion, a typeface produced by the Adobe Corporation specifically for the Macintosh personal computer and released in 1990. Designed by Robert Slimbach, Minion combines the classic characteristics of old-style faces with the full complement of weights required for modern typesetting. (original typography)

Hence a clear reason exists to suggest that the title of the novel indeed refers to an Apple Macintosh PowerBook. Putting this seemingly insignificant detail in dialogue

with the design of Hayles' book *Writing Machines* and her theoretical framework of media-specific analysis produces interesting results. Namely, in *The PowerBook*, Winterson draws attention to the specificity of print, albeit less explicitly than *Writing Machines*. The former draws attention to the way print fiction is commonly produced by slightly altering its conventions: it solely numbers the right pages of the novel, uses alternating capitalisation as chapter titles, and concludes by adding the above-mentioned note on the type.

In *The PowerBook*, Winterson incorporates metaphors of and references to computer technology, through which the narrative stresses the practice of writing stories on a laptop. The novel contains multiple narrations, as does Winterson's earlier novel *Sexing the Cherry*. *Sexing the Cherry*, however, achieves its anti-linear plot and multi-linear perspectives without references to computer technology. *The PowerBook* received a number of highly critical reviews, all of which touched upon its use of computer-related references. DeLombard in her article, entitled "Control Option Delete", calls the novel a "non-narrative narrative of illicit love" (24) and dismisses Winterson's technological appropriations by stating that "the much-vaunted liberatory possibilities of cyberspace add merely another dimension to the itinerant possibilities of all prose, the seduction of all narrative" (24). DeLombard furthermore states that Winterson, "good postmodernist that she is", is actually "more interested in the telling than in the story itself" (24), and as a result, the fracturing of conventional story-telling of the novel leaves the reader "yearning for the completeness of a traditional narrative, however illusionary that may be" (24). At the end of her piercingly critical review, she wonders whether "Winterson's postmodern dabbling has not become, like bright plastic casings of Mac Powerbooks themselves, merely another instance of trendy packaging replacing a more substantive – here, literary – product" (25). Turner, in the *London Review of Books*, goes even further by stating that "*The PowerBook* is not methodologically new. Except that it isn't really a novel anyway. It's more like a set of short stories being marketed as a novel" (10). This view of the novel is echoed in Showalter's review, where she calls the novel "literary junk food" (9). Despite these critics' negative reception of *The PowerBook*, the novel may also be seen as a literary innovation, because it succeeds in

interweaving virtual and real life, digital and analog in a powerful multitude of narratives. The novel portrays an innovative method of combining online and offline spaces and actions, as well as appropriating diverse literary sources and references to historical events.

PART TWO

EMBODIMENT

CHAPTER THREE EMBODIMENT IN SEXING THE CHERRY

3.1 Dissecting the Monstrous Grotesque¹¹

The Dog-Woman of *Sexing the Cherry* is a character not easily forgotten; she is gigantic, loud, dirty and immensely powerful. This section analyses which representational strategies Winterson uses to describe her and questions how the Dog-Woman's monstrous form ties in with her function in the narrative as a whole. This section explores possible precedents of female monsters upon which the character of the Dog-Woman may have been built. As an analytical tool to further the exploration of the Dog-Woman's representation, the psychoanalytical concept of the *abject*, as developed by Kristeva, is used.

The Dog-Woman's name¹² derives from one of her greatest passions in life: her fifty dogs (and counting!), which she lovingly takes care of. Even though she "would like to take Jordan to live in the country," she must remain close to Hyde Park in London, where she enters her dogs in the races and fights. This activity is a source of income and pleasure to her, even though every Saturday she comes home "covered in saliva and bitten to death" (13).

The Dog-Woman's monstrous appearance is noteworthy, and has, subsequently, sparked numerous debates and analyses. Prominent scholars in the fields of literary studies, psychoanalytic criticism, and gender studies have all dissected this monster in different ways. Naturally, the various methods of cutting and peeling away, combined

¹¹ The title of this section is an allusion to the 16th century anatomical theatre. In these public performances bodily/anatomical knowledge was promoted by dissecting bodies of executed criminals. This section analyses how bodily descriptions produce knowledge of the characters' internal world.

¹² The Dog-Woman as a character has a precedent in some other sources, of which Winterson may or may not have been aware: Shushu Marimi, a doglike woman, appears in a collection of texts from the Yana, a native Californian people who spoke a Hokan language. An extensive analysis is found in: Sapir, Edward. "Yana Texts by Edward Sapir, Together with Yana Myths Collected by Roland B. Dixon". *American Archaeology and Ethnology* 9.1 (1910): 1-235. Additionally, the Cora people (an indigenous ethnic group of Western Central Mexico) carry a myth in which the human race stems from a man and a dog-woman, who are the only survivors of a cataclysmic flood.

with the use of different tools, have produced different outcomes. The Dog-Woman introduces herself in the following manner:

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. But I have fine blue eyes that see in the dark. (24)

Admittedly, the Dog-Woman would make a poor contestant in a beauty-pageant. Nevertheless, the way the Dog-Woman's physique is described is far from straightforwardly monstrous: throughout the novel, the character remains *human*. Many other examples of monsters in literature (think, for instance, of the "Creature" in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*), are described as having too few or too many limbs, or even having added mechanical features. Thus, these characters can be said to be monstrous in an inhuman sense because they lose their human characteristics. The exact reason why the Dog-Woman is monstrous in a human sense (and therefore easier to identify with and hence more powerful) lies in the way her *excesses* are underlined: her cavities, spit, and dirt. In other words, Winterson's method to construct such an obviously horrendous character is zooming in on the extreme details of bodily excesses. Rather than presenting a broader (and, possibly, a less horrific) representation of the Dog-Woman, she instead delves into minute details and makes visible the barely seen: pores, hairs, scars, spots, marks, fleas and lice are all drawn to the fore and placed in full view.

The dynamic of difference and monstrosity is discussed by Braidotti, who observes that the category Woman has a "natural" affiliation with the category of monstrosity:

Woman as a sign of difference is monstrous. If we define the monster as a bodily entity that is anomalous and deviant vis-à-vis the norm, then we can argue that the female body shares with the monster the privilege of bringing out a unique blend of *fascination and horror*. This logic of attraction and repulsion is extremely significant; psychoanalytic theory takes it as the fundamental structure of the mechanism of desire and, as such, of the constitution of the neurotic symptom. (81)

It should hence not be surprising that many female authors construct monsters as their main focal point; there is a creative pool of female monstrous representations spanning centuries for them to draw upon.

In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva describes the abject as that which “disturbs identity, system and order... [and] does not respect borders, positions, rules” (4). The abject is “that which defines what is fully human from what is not” (65). By this, Kristeva refers to that which threatens the subject by transgressing the bodily boundaries between self and other, challenging bodily identity. Most of what is abject centres around the body, vomit, blood, saliva, filth, waste, pus, bodily fluids, and open wounds; those substances which are disturbing because they turn insides out. These matters are unmentionable materials which should not be represented, precisely because they cross the acceptable boundaries between what is inside and what is outside. This binary opposition between the inner and the outer can be stretched to include other binary divisions. Kristeva employs and analyses several other divisionary pairs, such as living vs. dead, human vs. animal, male vs. female, clean vs. defiled, and natural vs. supernatural. In Winterson’s novels in general, and in *Sexing the Cherry* in particular, these divisions are first instated and then questioned. The Dog-Woman is a challenging configuration, as she incorporates the abject (body horror) by displaying the body as disfigured, diseased, infiltrated and transformed. Kristeva says people feel repulsion and horror when confronted by images of the abject because of their ambiguity, whether the other is external or internal. In the case of *Sexing the Cherry*, it is the Dog-Woman, the human animal, who becomes the monster by transgressing taboos of the flesh.

Even though the Dog-Woman does not identify herself explicitly as a monster, she is labelled as abhorrent from the start through the outcries of other characters in the novel. She is a “mountain range” (25); she instils fear because she “stand[s] taller than all of them,” and she broke her father’s legs when he swung her up on his lap to tell her a story. Whereas most other characters in the novel react with fear and loathing at their first sight of her, Jordan is not in the least repulsed by his mother. On the contrary, for him she is a playground, a solid rock. Even though the Dog-Woman is not his birth-mother, she explicitly mentions feeling “motherly” love for Jordan, and “sat him on the palm of [her] hand in the way [she] would a puppy, and [she] held him to [her] face and let him pick the fleas out of [her] scars” (25). Jordan also liked to sit on top of her “much as a fly rests on a hill of dung” (11). In one of the opening scenes of the novel,

the Dog-Woman explicitly states that she: “would have liked to pour out a child from [her] body but you have to have a man for that and there’s no man who’s a match for [her]” (11). She is aware of her exceptional size, and of its inherent limitations for pregnancy, in this particular case. Nonetheless, her down-to-earth and positive attitude ensures she opts for other strategies.

The Dog-Woman uses her clear voice as an additional source of power, complementing the authoritative presence instilled by her grotesque size. However, contrary to most traditional literary female monsters who are only represented through the voice of others, the monstrous Dog-Woman is given a powerful voice which ensures her crucial role for the narrative structure of the novel.¹³ The Dog-Woman uses her monstrosity as a source of power and empowerment; she does not shy away from society, cover her face, remain silent, or passive. On several occasions, instead of her strength and critical voice, it is her abject-like embodiment, her excess fluids and smells which are her most powerful weapons. To force the herbalist Thomas Johnson to hurry up and show his strange and wonderful fruit (a banana), she pushes him into her dress. As a result Johnson was: “soon coughing and crying because I haven’t had that dress off in five years” (12). During a swelteringly warm summer in 1640, the Dog-Woman sweats excessively, and “these waterfalls took with them countless lice and other timid creatures” (22), which she, grudgingly, washes away under the pump. The Dog-Woman turns her apparent “weakness”, her monstrous size, into a source of strength, a powerful weapon.

Martin’s article, “The Power of Monstrous Women,” discusses the implications of such a monstrous figure, through the means of a comparison with two other novels that portray monstrous female characters. Martin’s article can be used to point out two different views on the monstrous female. She argues that the female monsters in Weldon’s *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, Carter’s *Nights at the Circus* and Winterson’s

¹³ Many instances of monsters who are *not* agents in their own story-telling spring to mind: most notably, though, in classical Greek and Roman mythology, of which March’s dictionary provides an extensive overview. Medusa, often depicted with snakes in her hair, turns her enemies into stone with her gaze; Circe, on the other hand, uses her sexual powers to turn men into pigs. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, Scylla with the six heads destroys ships by making them crash upon her cliff, backed up by Charibdis, a giant female who sucks the water from the sea three times daily.

Sexing the Cherry fail to convince the reader of their powers. By comparison, she claims, female monsters in fiction written by male authors offer a more elaborate, convincing and powerful portrayal. However, it can be said that the Dog-Woman's grotesque figuration can be read in two ways: as an empowered/empowering character and as a limited and passive construction. Winterson's Dog-Woman is a highly sexual character and uses (in her seventeenth-century form) her sexuality and her sex as a weapon.¹⁴ She suffocates men by squeezing them between her breasts, and bites off a man's penis when performing oral sex on him.

In the section of the novel entitled "Some Years Later," set in contemporary London, a young woman, beautiful, cultured, with a degree in Chemistry, involved in a campaign for the protection of the environment, draws strength from a sort of archetypal ancestor, a huge and enormously strong woman who lived in seventeenth-century London. In Winterson's novel, life is a source of multiple existences and characters' lives are grafted onto one another, even across the centuries. From time to time, the young woman imagines herself as "huge, raw, a giant" and sees another self, with a skirt "swirling round me, like a whirlpool," who goes to the centres of world power, the World Bank and the Pentagon, with a sack over her shoulder, to "stop off all over the world filling it up" (121-22). The enormous woman who inhabits her mind takes on a power usually denied to the female: she pulls bullets out of her wounds and chews them up, she breaks down the doors of Boardrooms and grabs political leaders, generals, bankers by the scruff of the neck and shoves them into her sack; she forces all the men to take training courses in feminism and ecology to change the world. It is the young woman's alter ego who gives her the strength to move out of the social structures and live literally on the margins of society. As a child, this young woman had an enormous body, constructed through her wish to resist the power of others: she says that she was not fat because she ate too much: "I hardly ate at all. I was fat because I wanted to be bigger than all the things that were bigger than me. All the things that had power over me. It was a battle I intended to win" (124). She imagined her parents'

¹⁴ An example of a self-destructive portrayal of female sexuality is found in Duncan Gibbin's film *Eve of Destruction* (1991), in which the female robot Eve's internal bomb detonates when she has an orgasm, killing others and herself. This could be said to be a very literal appropriation of the French term for experiencing orgasm, namely "la petite mort" [the little death].

house as a huge shell, “an environment suitable for a fantastic creature who needed to suck in the warmth and nourishment until it was ready to shrug off the shell and burst out ... I was a monster in a carpeted egg” (124). When she no longer needed her enormous size, the fat literally disappeared (“Where did it go? Where does it come?” 124-25), but inside herself there remained “an *alter ego* who was huge and powerful,” her patron saint, and every time this figure is invoked “I felt my muscles swell and laughter fill up my throat” (125). The young woman still feels monstrous: “I may not look like a monster any more but I couldn’t hide it for long” (127), since the other self is hidden within her body, visible to anyone who would turn her eyelids back, or look inside her ears, or examine the back of her throat: “He’d see her, the other one, lurking inside. She fits, even though she’s so big” (127). The modern day version of the Dog-Woman expresses an *internalised* power and empowerment which results in intellectual and verbal influence, instead of the physically external or abject-like violence displayed by the seventeenth-century figure of the Dog-Woman. This reversal of power as a typically male-dominated characteristic is underlined by de Zordo as she states:

Through the character of Dog-Woman the female has appropriated a male role [...] her abnormal body is explicitly associated with the male attributes of violence and physical strength, as well as being actively engaged in historical events, as her energetic contribution to the struggle against the ruling Puritans reveals. (445)

Winterson deploys various strategies to display the character of the Dog-Woman as an empowered character. Through the means of altering negatively coded bodily characteristics into positive values, Winterson creates a female monster, which, nevertheless, remains human throughout the novel. Furthermore, by underlining the Dog-Woman’s excessive bodily fluids and subsequently describing them as sources of empowerment, Winterson subverts the negative connotations of the *abject*. The Dog-Woman’s excessive weight is portrayed as an additional source of authority. That, in the novel, excessive weight need not be external to be powerful is made apparent by the present-day character of the Dog-Woman: the unnamed ecologist/feminist draws strength and determination from her internalised, monstrously heavy alter-ego.

3.2 WEIGHT AND LIGHTNESS

Matter, that thing the most solid and well-known, which you are holding in your hands and which makes up your body, is now known to be mostly empty space. Empty space and points of light. What does this say about the reality of the world? (8)

This section explores the representation of the characters' body-weight, which, it can be argued, is connected to their experience of the space they reside in and to their world-views. The juxtaposition between the heavy Dog Woman and the ephemeral Dancing Princesses (Fortunata in particular) produces meaning in the text. Furthermore, Winterson plays with stereotypical ideas of the body as she deconstructs and reconfigures boundaries of gender: the Dog-Woman shows motherly love whilst also being a violent character, Jordan is gentle and at the same time heroic, and the Dancing Princesses are surprisingly violent and do not seem to fit their angelic representations. Furthermore, throughout the novel, Winterson subverts the traditionally negative connotations of abject-like functions of the body: excesses such as saliva and pus play a prominent positive role in the narrative.¹⁵

Winterson uses different strategies to portray the weight of the characters' bodies in *Sexing the Cherry*: the Dog-Woman's body is described as heavy, whereas the weight of Jordan's body is not mentioned; it is only described as being fluid as the sea. The body-weight of the Twelve Dancing Princesses is so light that it defeats the laws of gravity. Furthermore, the body-weight of the characters affects their movements: the Dog-Woman is static and slow, Jordan is dynamic and quick, and the Twelve Dancing Princesses move with such incredible speed that they overcome the gravitational pull of the earth. A basic principle of categorisation in physics that classifies materials as solid, fluid, or gaseous is an illustrative metaphor to explore the manner in which the characters' weight is represented.

¹⁵ Kristeva's concept of the *abject* is not used as a dominant tool of analysis in this section, even though parallels can be drawn with representations of excessive weight and the abject: weight can thereby be characterised as an excesses of fat, signifying a duplication of the body's resources.

Thus, the Dog-Woman is connected with *earth* (solid), Jordan with *water* (fluid), and the Twelve Dancing Princesses are connected with *air* (gaseous). Additionally, as a tool for understanding (Western) ideas and ideals of body weight and appearance, Bordo's book *Unbearable Weight*, constitutes a productive theoretical framework to explore the representations of the characters' body-weight. Bordo states that:

[...] as the body itself is dominantly imagined within the West as belonging to the "nature" side of a nature/culture duality, the *more* body one has, the more uncultured and uncivilized one has been expected to be. (195, emphasis in original)

Following this line of thought, it could be argued that the Dog-Woman, with her excessively sized body, would automatically be read as uncivilised. To a certain extent this is the case, as she uses her immense proportions to inspire fear and awe in her enemies which could hence be deemed uncivilised behaviour. Furthermore, of major importance to the understanding of what precisely constitutes a body as overweight are not so much its proportions. Bordo states that both ideals of compulsive dieting and body building are actually only superficially different, as having substantial weight more precisely refers to having excess flesh:

[...] they [dieting and body building] are united in battle against the common enemy: the soft, the loose; unsolid, excess flesh. It is perfectly permissible in our culture (even for women) to have substantial weight and bulk – so long as it is tightly managed. Simply to be slim is not enough – the flesh must not "wobble." (191)

However, achieving this ideal body in which no parts wiggle is not easy, as Bordo states: "Unless one takes to muscle-building, to achieve a flab-free, *excess-free* body one must trim very near the bone" (191, emphasis mine). Here an echo of the *abject* is heard: a body with excess flesh is monstrous, simply because it is *too much* of something that needs to be restricted. Bordo mentions Douglas who has argued that "anxiety about the maintenance of rigid body boundaries (manifested, for example, in rituals and prohibitions concerning excreta, saliva and the strict delineation of "inside" and "outside" [i.e. the *abject*]) is most evident and intense in societies whose external boundaries are under attack" (198-99). Therefore, the Dog-Woman's body can be said to not only instil fear in others because of its powerful size, but also because it fails to maintain its boundaries as saliva, pus and sweat exude from it.

The Dog-Woman is characterised predominantly by her excessive size:

As for my size, I know only that before Jordan was found a travelling circus came through Cheapside, and in that circus was an elephant [...] It is a responsibility for a woman to have forced an elephant into the sky. What it says of my size I cannot tell, for an elephant looks big, but how am I to know what it weighs? A balloon looks big and weighs nothing. (24-25)

Consequently the Dog-Woman shows awareness of her extraordinary size, but remains in the dark about her weight. In this particular passage above, she questions the relationship between weight and size, using a balloon as a point of reference. The reader will by now have concluded that the Dog-Woman is of equally excessive weight as her size may predict. However, the Dog-Woman perceives her body as bigger than normal, but does not necessarily consider it to be heavy. Nevertheless, the novel carries multiple instances in which her excessive weight becomes apparent: she forces an elephant into the sky by throwing herself on the other seat with all her might, and breaks both her father's legs when he swings her on his lap to tell her a story (25). Other elements provide clues to her weight and largeness, namely the way in which the Dog-Woman describes the clothes she wears. When returning home to London from her six-year stay in Wimbledon, the Dog-Woman wears her best dress, namely:

[...] the one with a wide skirt that would serve as a sail for some war-torn ship, and a bit of fancy lace at the neck, made by a blind woman who had intended it to be a shawl. I had given her some estimate of my dimensions, but she would not believe me and so, although I have nothing to go round my shoulders save a dozen blankets sewn together, I do have a fine-worked collar. (65)

The blind woman does not believe the Dog-Woman's measurements to be true, and as a result she follows her own parameters to design a shawl, which illustrates the Dog-Woman's uncommonly large size. Further items of clothing that refer to her excessive size are a plumed hat on her head, similar to the way in which "a bird nests on a tree" (15); and when Jordan returns to London, she wears a new dress made of the finest wool "with a beautiful shawl cut out of the altar cloth of Stepney Church" (108). The descriptions of the items of clothing the Dog-Woman wears further underline her exceptionally large proportions.

Remarkably, the Dog-Woman's actions as well as the way clothes fit her, often refer to animals, which further underlines the Dog-Woman's connection with *earth* as Winterson deploys flora and fauna terms to describe her. As quoted above, the plumed hat fit on her head as a bird would nest on a tree; she wore her best clothes for her first love, a boy selling ribbons, which she described as decking herself "like a bullock at a fair" (35); leaving Hyde Park one night, sawdust covered her as though she "was a cow hung for meat" (84); she attacks a man by "forcing open his jaw as [she] would to get a chicken bone out of a dog" (85); and picks up Preacher Scroggs "by the neck, the way a terrier does to a rat" (88). In this manner, Winterson collates the Dog-Woman's actions and appearance with those of animals, thereby stressing her connection with solid matter.

Surprisingly, on two occasions the Dog-Woman manages to be imperceptible and invisible, which is a great feat for someone with her immense proportions. In the opening pages of the novel, the Dog-Woman describes her other passion, apart from her passion for her dogs, namely that of singing. When she sings, she can "melt into the night as easily as a thin thing that sings in the choir at church"; and she sings "inside the mountain of my flesh, and my voice is as slender as a reed and my voice as no lard in it" (14). Another instance of the Dog-Woman becoming invisible is when she washes herself after having killed Preacher Scroggs and Firebrace: "When I was clean I walked home naked and burned my clothes in a quiet fire. No one saw me. Like the angels, I can be invisible when there is work to be done" (89). The Dog-Woman's excessive bulk is not a burden to her: she finds ways to escape the visibility her weight produces when necessary. Accordingly, the Dog-Woman's grounded body is not as fixed as it may seem: if she needs to be temporarily invisible, she imagines herself imperceptible. The fixedness of her body-parts becomes more changeable: they can vanish into thin air if they are a hindrance to her at a specific moment. An inspiring view of (inter)changeable body-parts is found in the philosophical work of Deleuze and Guattari. Grosz uses their theory and applies it to psychoanalytic views of the body. In her book *Volatile Bodies*, she explains that Deleuze and Guattari view the subject's body as an assemblage

of body-parts which change their functions when they come into contact with other parts, and when other roles are required of them. Grosz argues:

Their notion of the body as a discontinuous, nontotalizable series of processes, organs, flows, energies, corporeal substances and incorporeal events, speeds and durations, may be of great value to feminists attempting to reconceive bodies outside the binary oppositions imposed on the body by the mind-body, nature-culture, subject-object and interior-exterior oppositions. (164)

The Dog-Woman's body is precisely this: her excess weight dissolves temporarily when she needs to be invisible to run naked through the town. Moreover, as Grosz argues, to imagine a body as consisting of changeable body-parts is to begin to reconstruct a body and its accompanying experience as limitless possibility. The Dog-Woman *chooses* to be excessively heavy when it suits her actions, and when she requires being invisible, she simply disappears.

The body-weight of the Twelve Dancing Princesses is portrayed as being incredibly light. In Winterson's rewriting of the classic Grimm Brothers' tale,¹⁶ the Twelve Dancing Princesses, one of whom is Fortunata, are kept in captivity, but at night, they manage to become so light, that they fly out through the window, visiting a city where everyone dances. The Twelve Dancing Princesses' bodies are composed of light or energy which travels across vast distances and is fuelled by their desire to dance. These ephemeral characters are introduced by Jordan, who is told of these wonderful dancing figures by the curator of a "Museum of Antiquities" (43). Jordan decides to go and see them, "equipped with a catch of herrings" (43). The following, internal title-page presents "*The Story of the Twelve Dancing Princesses*" [emphasis mine], which depicts angel-like creatures flying from an open window. Subsequently, each tale is illustrated with a small flying female figure with long hair and wavy dress. One by one, the Princesses recount their life stories: all stories start in medias res and consist of grammatically simple sentences, a narrative structure reminiscent of folk-tales and also

¹⁶ The *Twelve Dancing Princesses* or *The Worn-Out Dancing Shoes* is a German fairy tale originally published by the Brothers Grimm in *Children's and Household Tales* (1814) as tale number 133. This original tale is not only recounted in Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* but also in the film *Barbie and the 12 Dancing Princesses*, which was released in the United States on September 19, 2006. Not surprisingly, the sisters' violent activities are absent in this rendition of the fairy tale.

of children's stories. Furthermore, these life-stories follow another stereotypical theme in folk-tales and fairy-tales, namely that of the *Ugly Duckling*. Fortunata embodies this ugly duckling, as she is the sister who is different from the others, who goes through a transition, and then transforms into a beautiful female and gains the love of the prince. Fortunata does not tell her story directly, but she is characterised through the stories of her other sisters. She is also the only Dancing Princess who has a name. Hence it is not surprising that Jordan falls in love with this particular Dancing Princess.

The eldest Dancing Princess tells Jordan their story, how the sisters flew every night from their beds to a "silver city" where the "occupation of the people was to dance" (48). Their father suspected their adventures but was unable to fathom how they escaped or where they went. Finally, a "clever prince" caught them flying through the window. The women were engaged to the prince and his eleven brothers. But in this retelling of the fairy-tale, this end is not *the* end: "as it says [we] lived happily ever after. We did, but not with our husbands" (48). One by one the women tell their stories, in which they abandon or kill abusive, repressive, or unfaithful husbands. In one story, the husband is, in fact, a woman: the Princess kills her "with a single blow to the head" (54) to save her from a vengeful mob. Another story is a rewriting of the classical children's story *Rapunzel*,¹⁷ told by one of the Dancing Princesses. In the beginning of this story it seems as though the Dancing Princess is simply narrating a different version of this well-known tale; however, towards the end, it is clear that she is actually recounting her own life-story. Rapunzel (the Princess) escaped from her parents who were only passionate about "collecting miniature dolls" (52) and went to live in a tower with an older woman. Rapunzel furthermore refused to marry the prince next door, which infuriated her parents to such an extent that they "vilified the couple, calling one a witch and the other one a little girl" (52). One day, the prince dressed up as Rapunzel's lover and entered the tower, where he tied up Rapunzel and waited for her real lover to arrive. The Dancing Princess then concludes the story, saying:

¹⁷ *Rapunzel* is a German fairy tale originally published by the Brothers Grimm in the first volume of *Children's and Household Tales* in 1812. It is one of the best known of fairy tales, and its plot has been used and parodied by many cartoonists and comedians, its best known line ("Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair") having entered popular culture.

Then he carried Rapunzel down the rope he had brought with him and forced her to watch while he blinded her broken lover in a field of thorns.
After that, they lived happily ever after, of course.
As for me [Rapunzel's lover, one of the Twelve Dancing Princesses], my body healed, though my eyes never did, and eventually I was found by my sisters, who had come in their various ways to live on this estate.
My own husband?
Oh well, the first time I kissed him he turned into a frog.
There he is, just by your foot. His name's Anton. (52)

These strategies of reversal and humour of these tales reconfigure power structures: the women violently reclaim their right to freedom and to self-narrative, and their narratives question mythical norms.

Interestingly, more focus has been placed on the embodiment of the Dog-Woman, and less on the way the Twelve Dancing Princesses' bodies and movements are represented in *Sexing the Cherry*. Seemingly, their bodies are less visible in a traditional sense, as they adhere more to stereotypical conventions of femininity: they are angelic, light and beautiful. Accordingly, there is an obvious difference between the heavy Dog-Woman and the ephemeral Dancing Princesses. Nevertheless, both are connected through Winterson's strategy of subverting stereotypical representations of femininity. The Dancing Princesses are deeply sexualised and violent, which is seemingly paradoxical to their lightness of being. The Dog-Woman and the Twelve Dancing Princesses are more similar than their different bodies may imply; they do have comparable characteristics. It could be argued that the Dancing Princesses are just as inhuman as the Dog-Woman. Especially Fortunata displays some inhuman qualities as she defeats the laws of gravity: in her younger days "she was so light that she could climb down a rope, cut it and tie it again in mid-air without plunging to her death" (60). The Twelve Dancing Princesses seemingly embody a patriarchal feminine stereotype, by dancing as if flying: an image reminiscent of many fairy tales.¹⁸ Winterson provides another twist to the original tale by dressing them in red, their black hair flowing wildly in the breeze. They are not draped in virgin-like white, as their physiques would suggest, but are clad in murderous and passionate red.

¹⁸ Many fairy-tales and folk-tales speak of princesses and other women who dance so gracefully that they seem to fly; see for instance the tale of *Cinderella/Aschenputtel* as recorded by the Brothers Grimm in the 19th century.

Jordan, who often reflects on the nature of time and the structure of reality, is *not* described in terms of his weight or the suppleness of his movements. However, Jordan is described as portraying a changing gender identity, as he occasionally dresses femininely. He is highly aware of the stereotypical views and codes attached to masculine and feminine genders, owning a rule book supplied by the woman who ran the fish stall at the local market. The stall-holder wrote the book to teach Jordan (in his feminine persona) "about men, worrying that I knew nothing" (32). Remarkably, point number five, on this list with ten points, reads: "Men deem themselves weighty and women light. Therefore it is simple to tie a stone round their necks and drown them should they become too troublesome" (32). Furthermore, the title of the novel, *Sexing the Cherry*, is of a particular relevance to the theme of gender hybridity or gender crossing. As Jordan sails to the Bermudas with Tradescant's ship, he reflects on the skill he mastered during the time he spent in France, namely that of grafting. When the Dog-Woman sees him trying to make "a yield between a Polstead Black and a Morello" (different types of cherries) she cries out in horror: "Of what sex is that monster you are making?" (79). After some time, Jordan's fruit of labour pays off: "the cherry grew, and we have sexed it and it is female" (79). The horticultural method of grafting produces hybrid species of flora which internalise different types of fruits or plants. Jordan himself uses this method as he changes from masculinity to femininity: it is as though Jordan grafts his gender-identity by exchanging his masculinity and femininity through the use of feminine clothes.

In a deeply embodied sense of gender-identity, Jordan can be said to function as a bridge between the characters of the Dog-Woman and the Dancing Princesses. Jordan is neither heavy nor light, neither identifying solely as feminine nor masculine; he travels and flows as a river to the sea. He is the *water* character, echoing the transitory state of the *solid* element in physics.

The manner in which the characters' body-weight is represented, is connected to their experience of the space they reside in and to the way in which the characters narrate. The juxtaposition between the heavy Dog Woman and the ephemeral Dancing

Princesses produces meaning in the text, as well as challenging the apparent difference between these two characters. Furthermore, Winterson plays with stereotypical ideas of the body as she deconstructs and reconfigures boundaries of gender.

CHAPTER FOUR EMBODIMENT IN THE POWERBOOK

4.1 VIRTUALITY ENGENDERED: FLUID GENDER CONSTRUCTIONS IN CYBERSPACE

Take off your clothes. Take off your body. Hang them up behind the door. Tonight we can go deeper than disguise. (4)

In *Sexing the Cherry*, Winterson challenges gender-boundaries as Jordan deconstructs and reconfigures them by exchanging his masculine position for a feminine one, as well as being aware of the cultural and social codes and effects of each gender. In *The PowerBook*, the boundaries of gender are similarly questioned, as the gender of the main protagonist of the novel remains unspecified. Following from the hypothesis that embodied means engendered, this section examines the role of cyberspace and digitalisation in *The PowerBook* and addresses the question of whether bodies disappear in cyberspace, and of whether gender stereotypes are subverted or reinstated.

Ali/Alix' e-stories aim to provide her/his clients with "freedom, just for one night" (3) so that they may go "deeper than disguise" (4), as they are asked to remove their clothing and even their bodies. Throughout, *The PowerBook* explores the relationship between bodies, technology, and gender-constructions in a postmodernist deconstructive way. Winterson draws on computer actions to frame her narrative, as the main narrator communicates with his/her client through the Internet. This main protagonist's gender remains ambiguous throughout the narrative. It is precisely this ambiguity that constitutes the focus of this section. Furthermore, it addresses the question of whether ambiguous gender is a strategy deeply inherent to cyberspace, where possibilities of disguise and masquerade are rampant.¹⁹ The fluid conception of

¹⁹ In her book *How We Became Posthuman*, Hayles elaborates on the way the body disappears in cyberspace as she focuses on Turing's test in 1950 in which he aimed to prove that machines can think. Hayles states that "In the push to achieve machines that can think, researchers performed again and again the erasure of embodiment at the heart of the Turing test" (xi). Information was perceived as something disconnected from the body where it

gender of the novel is mirrored in its deconstruction of linear narratives and dominant literary conventions. The fluidity of gender-constructions also plays a dominant role in Winterson's earlier novel, *Sexing the Cherry*, in which Jordan occasionally dresses and identifies as feminine. *The PowerBook* features a similar method of gender-crossing: sixteenth-century Ali uses clothes and attributes to cross from feminine to masculine. The crucial difference in the way both novels represent the action of gender-crossing, however, is that *The PowerBook* draws on the virtual world of cyberspace, whereas *Sexing the Cherry* is set only in *offline* time-periods and locations.

Crucially, the first contact, which is virtual, between Ali/Alix and his/her client evolves precisely around the issue of gender, as her/his client ("you") enquires:

You said, "Who are you?"
"Call me Ali."
"Is that your real name?"
"Real enough."
"Male or female?"
"Does it matter?"
"It's a co-ordinate."
"This is a virtual world." (30)

This passage illustrates how trivial it is to Ali/Alix to state a specific gender; he/she discredits it, because "this is a virtual world". However, to his/her client, "you" knowing Ali/Alix' gender *does* matter: to her, it is a "co-ordinate" (30). Supposedly, to Ali/Alix, in a virtual world, gender is irrelevant, as is the act of naming: "Ali" is a "real enough" name, presumably because it is her/his so-called online nickname. In this particular case, naming *is* relevant: the plot of the e-story that Ali/Alix writes is derived from the word tulip. The passage quoted above shows that Ali/Alix regards the Web as disconnected from the real world, where oppression and difficulties of exclusion and prejudice influence people's experiences.

In the first e-story of the novel, "OPEN HARD DISK", the sixteenth-century character Ali uses two tulip bulbs and a stem to exchange her femininity for masculinity. When she wears this phallic-like extension, she consistently identifies herself as

originated from and as such "[...] it was a small step to think of information as a kind of bodiless fluid that could flow between different substrates without loss of meaning or form" (xi).

masculine. Ali's way of formulating her gender-identity is an act or performance or masquerade. Butler, a prominent poststructuralist philosopher who has contributed to the fields of feminism, queer theory, political philosophy, and ethics, theorised that gender is:

[...] instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, [gender] must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. [...] If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style. (402)

Here, the crux of Butler's argument is that the coherence of the categories of sex, gender, and sexuality, the natural-seeming coherence, for example, of masculine gender and heterosexual desire in male bodies, is culturally constructed. These bodily acts establish the appearance of an essential "core" gender. This is the sense in which Butler famously theorises gender, along with sex and sexuality, as *performative*. The performance of gender, sex, and sexuality, however, is not a voluntary choice for Butler: she locates the construction of the gendered subject within "regulative discourses".²⁰ These decide in advance what possibilities of sex, gender, and sexuality are socially permitted to appear as coherent or natural. Regulative discourses include disciplinary techniques which maintain the appearance in those subjects of the "core" gender, sex and sexuality the discourse itself produces. This performance is particularly apparent in cyberspace: it provides the possibility of concealing or altering gender because the body is invisible. This possibility is part of a wider discourse on the possibilities and limitations in cyberspace. Gender-divisions can be crossed in this space; this is a popular belief and a recurrent theme in many theoretical analyses of cyberspace. There is a freedom to choose one's own gender, which is unhindered by sexed embodiment. However, in *The PowerBook*, sixteenth-century Ali exchanges her femininity for masculinity without the use of cyberspace, and she wonders what the limitations and effects are of disguising her body by dressing as a man:

²⁰ Here, Butler draws on Foucault's philosophical framework on the way the body is regulated through society, as is elaborated in his book *Discipline and Punish*.

I know about disguise. I disguise myself from predators. I disguise myself from circumstance. The camouflages I use are elaborate, but I know what they are. Even my body is in disguise today. But what if my body is the disguise? What if skin, bone, liver, veins, are the things I use to hide myself? I have put them on and I can't take them off. Does that trap me or free me? (16-17)

Even though Ali does not specifically refer to the disguise she uses to cross from feminine to masculine, she does wonder whether her body itself may be her most elaborate disguise. She cannot remove it, as her life depends on it. In the novel, the question of whether gender is a performative construct or of whether it is naturally given remains open. This can be said to be one of the strongest postmodern points of the novel, as Winterson asks questions without answering them in turn. In a way, it is up to the reader to make up her/his own mind.

Carlson, in his interview with Winterson on *The PowerBook*, asks how she sees the Internet changing relationships between people, stressing the importance of relationships in literature. Winterson responds:

If more and more people are using the computer to communicate, I think more and more people will be playing with ideas of identity. [...] I take a very positive view of the technology, but it's up to us how we use it. If we just become robotic idiots and let technology ruin our lives, then more fool us. (4)

Winterson does precisely that in her novel: she plays with ideas of identity in relation to computer-based communication, thereby foregrounding the possibility that cyberspace allows for gender-crossing. In *The PowerBook*, cyberspace is positioned as one of the many environments in which gender-constructions are fluid.

4.2 EXPERIENCING/EMBODYING THE TEXT

The PowerBook contains few references to the characters' physical appearance, especially when compared to *Sexing the Cherry*, which contains multiple descriptions of bodies. The theme of embodiment only plays a role in *The PowerBook* when the characters are engaged in sexual activities or when preparing or consuming food. In *The PowerBook*, virtual connections are blended with real-life connections, as the focus gradually shifts from virtual communication to face-to-face contact. Ali/Alix meets his/her lover in Paris and Capri, where they engage in a love-affair.

In *The PowerBook*, the main characters' bodies, that is, Ali/Alix and her client/lover, remain largely unrepresented; their material attributes are only focused upon in *offline* spaces, i.e. in the streets and hotels in Paris and Capri, where eroticism and romance are of key importance. Surprisingly, the characters in the commissioned electronic stories *are* described in terms of their bodily appearance. In the first e-story, about sixteenth-century Ali smuggling tulip bulbs to Holland, some references are made to her appearance. Interestingly, the issue of weight, or the absence of it, appears again, echoing the ephemeral Twelve Dancing Princesses in *Sexing the Cherry*. When Ali was born, her father wanted to drown her as he feared a daughter would impoverish the family; her mother persuaded him to let her live in male disguise, to "see if [she] could bring any wealth to the household" (11). She did, by using her extreme slimness to become a spy:

So slender am I, and so slight, that I can slip under the door of a palace, or between the dirt and the floor of a hovel and never be seen. A golden thread, a moment's talk, a spill of coffee, a pepper seed, is all the distance I am between one side and the other. (11)²¹

The slimness of Ali's body is exaggerated to such an extent that it becomes unbelievable and reiterates inhuman possibilities. The portrayal of Ali's body and the

²¹ Winterson here displays her fascination with quantum physics: she describes Ali's slim body using a basic principle in this field of physics in which distances between separate atoms are said to be virtually infinite: a molecule thereby consists of mostly empty space, or nothingness.

actions which it enables echoes Fortunata's disappearing body in *Sexing the Cherry* as she dances and spins with the speed of light. Ali's sixteenth-century body is again made explicit when she is confronted with pirates from Genoa swarming the ship. Interestingly, Ali wonders how she could barter philosophies with the Captain when she experiences that her "bulbs were itching" (20). This is the first instance in which Ali identifies herself as masculine, even though she has the body of a female. The addition of a phallic signifier, the two bulbs and stem, thus affects the way she identifies herself. It is as though Winterson's characters' gender-identifications are as fluid and multilayered as the layout and narrative structure of the novel. Subsequently, Ali achieves a sense of freedom to identify herself as masculine while inhabiting a female body. This freedom which is experienced by Ali/Alix' fictitious character is meant to equally liberate his/her client: the reader of her/his e-stories. E-fiction provides the reader/recipient freedom from the body and its inscribed collection of (lived) experiences, so that she/he can experience an alternative reality.

The reality of the flesh returns when Ali/Alix meets her/his lover in Paris. This chapter entitled "NEW DOCUMENT" describes her client's life-story: her failed marriage, her love of freedom, and the relationship she has to her body. At a crucial stage in this chapter, Ali/Alix is angry with her/himself, because his/her anticipation has destroyed his/her ability to enjoy the present moment. The evening did not proceed as he/she had planned, and Ali/Alix reflects on the nature of her/his imagination as an attempt to understand why he/she feels disappointed: "The trouble is that in imagination anything can be perfect. Downloaded into real life, it was messy. She was messy. I was messy" (54). Thus, Ali/Alix distinguishes the imaginative world he/she creates in her/his e-stories from real-life reality and acknowledges that, in the latter, Ali/Alix may not be able to direct the sequence of events to her/his wishes.

Interestingly, in *The PowerBook* as a whole, Ali/Alix' body remains unrepresented, as no specific references are made to the way he/she looks, moves, talks, and experiences the world around her/him. Although Ali/Alix' body is unrepresented, he/she does connect her/his genetic make-up to language and story-telling:

The alphabet of my DNA shapes certain words, but the story is not told. I have to tell it myself. What is it that I have to tell myself again and again? That there is always a new beginning, a different end. I can change the story. I am the story. Begin. (4-5)

This way, Ali/Alix firmly lodges the activity of writing and story-telling inside her/his body. It appears then that to Ali/Alix story-telling is a highly subjective and embodied activity, which is seemingly impossible to transfer to others.

There is a continuous movement back-and-forth between the writer, Ali/Alix, and the reader, his/her client, as their boundaries and functions within the narrative become blurred. The distant client, known only at the virtual level of online communication, enters the narrative in the flesh after having participated in the process of writing. Ali/Alix' client, in the chapter named "Terrible Thing to do to a Flower," responds to the e-story she has received, and expresses her discontent with it. Ali/Alix immediately responds to her dismay and asks why she is unhappy. The following passage illustrates the dialogue between the two main characters as they both explore their expectations of the story. In this passage, the specific question of what constitutes romance is debated. Ali/Alix starts the virtual conversation:

I tap back, "When you came on-line you said you wanted to be transformed."
"Into a flower-fucking princess?"
"Well, your alias is Tulip."
"That wasn't my idea of romance."
"Was it romance you wanted?"
"Doesn't everyone?"
"Download *Romeo and Juliet*."
"Teenage sex."
"*Wuthering Heights*."
"The weather's awful and I hate the clothes."
"*Heat and Dust*."
"I'm allergic to dust."
"*The Passion*."
"Never heard of it."
"Oh well..."
"Come on, this is your job. You say you write stories. Write me a story."
"Freedom for just one night, you said."
"Yes."
"All right, but if I start this story..."
"Yes?"
"It may change under my hands." (29-30)

The novel raises several interesting concepts which may fruitfully be brought into dialogue with contemporary debates on the implications of technologically-mediated communication. Crucially, *The PowerBook* offers new ways to represent bodies by questioning the binary oppositions between masculine and feminine. Furthermore, it foregrounds the importance of the body in practices of story-telling, and the experiential effects that both reading and writing have on bodies.

CONCLUSION

Both in *Sexing the Cherry* and *The PowerBook* the themes of story-telling and embodiment are of primary importance and are intricately interconnected. In *Sexing the Cherry*, the Dog-Woman has a heavy, monstrous body. Jordan's body-weight is unspecified, but he is characterised by the manner in which he reflects on gender-constructions. He crosses genders with the same ease with which he crosses vast stretches of sea by ship. The changeability of his body reflects upon his perspective toward historiography: Jordan narrates historical events, as well as his own experiences, in an anti-linear fashion. To him, multiple versions of truth exist, without hierarchy. The body-weight of the Twelve Dancing Princesses is so small that it defeats the laws of gravity. These twelve sisters are unconcerned about issues of fact and fiction when they tell their stories: to them, story-telling is as ephemeral as their bodies. *Sexing the Cherry* proposes other ways to represent bodies by changing traditionally negatively viewed bodily appearances and actions into positive, as well as by focusing on gender as a changeable, embodied characteristic. Simultaneously, the novel proposes that in story-telling and in re/writing history, no hierarchical distinction exists between fact and fiction.

Winterson's *The PowerBook* is set in multiple locations and in several time-periods, thus, this novel contains a fluid conception of time and space, similar to *Sexing the Cherry*. The narratives travel through geographical space and through time; each chapter is set in a different location and time than the one preceding it. The narratives of the novel displace time while simultaneously connecting the nature of time with embodiment. The seemingly disconnected chapters are, however, connected by their belief in the power of love. Love makes time stand still, builds bridges to cross centuries and countries. *The PowerBook* blends the real-life world of fleshy bodies, food, and sexual encounters with the virtual world of cyberspace. Similar to *Sexing the Cherry*, the novel expands the possibilities of narrative techniques by creating multiple time-frames and portraying characters that cross gender boundaries. Ali/Alix' body escapes

representation in the novel; the other characters' bodies are only described when they are either involved in sexual activities, or in the preparation or consumption of food.

The themes of embodiment and story-telling interconnect in *Sexing the Cherry* and *The PowerBook*, and, moreover, reinforce each other. Furthermore, the novels centralise the act of story-telling to construct new ways of embodiment, and both novels propose innovative ways to represent bodies and narrate stories. Most literary explorations compare *Sexing the Cherry* to Winterson's earlier works of fiction, and identify their common elements. Generally, these analyses focus on the way in which time and matter constitute the central focus of the novel. However, not one investigation pays specific attention to the use of symbols in the novel, which serve to identify its multiple narrators. As the thesis has attempted to show, Winterson's use of typography in *Sexing the Cherry* serves to structure the narrative, as it contains multiple narrators, time-frames and locations, which would be difficult to perceive as a whole without such use of visual techniques of demarcation. The material construction of *The PowerBook* similarly contains markers of guidance, as the use of capitalised and lower-case typography in the titles of the chapters directs the reader through the maze of online and offline narratives.

In *The PowerBook*, Winterson incorporates metaphors of and references to computer technology, through which the narrative stresses the practice of writing stories on a laptop. The novel contains multiple narrations, as does Winterson's earlier novel *Sexing the Cherry*. *Sexing the Cherry*, however, achieves its anti-linear plot and multi-linear perspectives without references to computer technology. In *The PowerBook*, the use of computers serves to portray one of the many environments in which gender-constructions can be crossed. Jordan's instances of gender-crossing in *Sexing the Cherry* testify to this, as his narratives are set in a time in which cyberspace did not exist. His method to exchange his masculine position for a feminine one is through the use of changing clothes. Ali, the sixteenth-century character in *The PowerBook*, similarly changes her gender-identification, as she exchanges her femininity for masculinity through a phallus-like addition. *The PowerBook* contains few references to the characters'

physical appearance, especially when compared to *Sexing the Cherry*, which contains multiple descriptions of bodies, which are especially characterised by their weight. The theme of embodiment only plays a role in *The PowerBook* when the characters are engaged in sexual activities or when preparing or consuming food. Indeed, in *The PowerBook*, the emphasis on bodies only occurs in real-life, offline space and time. In the novel, virtual connections are blended with real-life connections, as the focus gradually shifts from virtual communication to face-to-face contact.

Thus, by analysing *Sexing the Cherry* and *The PowerBook* simultaneously, their methods of representing story-telling and embodiment appear intricately interwoven in both novels. Crucially, the two novels echo and interweave each other's themes. The theme of the irrelevance of naming is found in both novels, as is the theme of crossing gender through the use of clothes or other items of apparel. Consequently, *The PowerBook*, published eleven years after *Sexing the Cherry*, discloses the methods used in *Sexing the Cherry* to re/write history. Similarly, the subject matter of virtual communication in *The PowerBook* serves as a foil for the use of multiple narratives in *Sexing the Cherry*. Thus, even though *Sexing the Cherry* and *The PowerBook* are separated by eleven years of time, and "time is a great deadener", many instances of cross-fertilisation occur.

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