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## SUBJECTIVE NON-LINEAR (HI)STORIES IN JEANETTE WINTERSON'S FICTION

Until the twentieth century Europe was much concerned with tradition, its own past, and strict moral values, which were clearly manifested in literature and the arts. The dominating mode of writing was realism which was to reflect the 'real' world. It was considered writers' and historiographers' ethical responsibility to represent human life and, above all, any historical events in an objective honest way, without idealization or commentary. Alison Lee in her work *Realism and Power*, limiting the term "Realism" to the literary conventions and their ideological implications of the nineteenth-century England and France (ix-x), explains:

The Realist aesthetic tended to distinguish between 'lying' literature and 'true', 'objective' history, and to ascribe a positive moral value to fact. History was seen as accessible as pure fact, independent of individual perception, ideology, or the process of selection [while] creating a written narrative (29).

It was generally believed that facts should speak for themselves, and any commentary, and romantic or poetic devices could only obscure the truth. Any departure from these beliefs, in literature as well, such as drawing attention to the process of writing or openly presenting a written work as an artifact, was considered a crime against Realism. The ending of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*: "Come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out" is only one of a variety of examples (qtd. in Lee 9).

The problem of the true and the fabulous history was not unknown even earlier. Hayden White in *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* writes that, according to the eighteenth-century thinkers, the fabulous, as opposed to the true, historiography "was conceived to be a product of pure invention" and its main function was to entertain.

Therefore, it was treated with contempt by both historians and thinkers, such as Voltaire or Bayle. The latter maintains in his *Historical Dictionary* "it is an essential thing for a historical composition to be free from lies; so that though it should have all other perfections, it will not be history, but a mere fable or romance..." (qtd. in White 1973, 49). Voltaire, in turn, in *Philosophy of History* claims that it is "a simple matter to distinguish between the true and the false in history. One had only to use common sense and reason to distinguish between the truthful and the fabulous ... in the historical record" (qtd. in White 1973, 51–52), and, having read some memoirs published in his times, he commented: "Almost every page is polluted by false statements and abuse of the royal family ... This is not writing history; it is writing slanders which deserve the pillory" (qtd. in White 1970, 50).

A vast number of writers were, nevertheless, hailed for creating true and objective works, but it was Sir Walter Scott, the famous Scottish historical novelist, who was most praised for the faithful reflection of historical facts in his fiction, as Lee relates:

The combination of fiction and history, particularly in Scott's novels, seemed to fulfil the Realist demands for objectivity, detail, democracy, and, above all, factual documentation. Henry James, for example, in *Fiction and Sir Walter Scott*, praises Scott's novels as the 'triumphs of fact' (30).

Scott used some well-known historical characters and events merely as the background to his works, which made the plot of the novels all the more probable and acceptable to the critics. Nevertheless, he himself in *Redgauntlet*

foregrounds problems of historical composition, from the potential unreliability of sources to the subjectivity inherent in their interpretation. ... [He] does not claim that history and fiction should be mutually exclusive but that, at the level of narrative, this distinction is impossible to sustain – and that even at the level of reference any representation of the past may benefit from its dissolution (Maitzen).

It was only later, in the twentieth century, that writers and theoreticians focused on the issue of historical unreliability. New Historicists, postmodernists, and feminists, among others, began questioning history's claims to know the past and the conviction that the past

exists in a pre-established form which simply requires human beings to discover it; that the historian can speak from a universal (objective) standpoint; that what constitutes the subject of history does not change with time and is agreed upon by most practitioners; that the historian can offer a totalizing, synoptic account of the past, which is complete in all necessary particulars (Gąsiorek 149).

In historiography, it led to admitting that no account of historical events can be utterly free from ideology, which should always be openly stated, and thus, no such account can ever be exhaustive. Moreover, any authority on history could from then on be questioned and historical texts became freely exposed to various interpretations (Gąsiorek 148; White qtd. in Domańska 12–13). Gąsiorek further argues that it turned out that history “is not only itself a form of fabulation but is also reliant on the very narrative strategies that historians previously claimed belonged to the imaginative world of literature, but not the more scholarly one of history” (149). These very claims were also put forward by Hayden White, who noticed that historical writing displays the features of fictional writing, such as: “selection of events, point of view, narrative organization of events, pattern making, character analysis, climaxes, conclusions” (Malcolm 16). Stephen Greenblatt, a critic and a new historicist, reasons in his *Introduction to Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* that

history has to renew itself by moving away from ‘realist’ assumptions about the meaning of a historical text towards a recognition that history and literature are discourses which *construct* rather than reflect, *invent* rather than discover, the past (Currie 88, my emphases).

The new ideas were immediately reflected in fiction, which led to the coining of a new term – “historiographic metafiction” – by Linda Hutcheon. On the surface the novels often maintained the pretence of reality and often represented historical figures, places, events and situations: Barnes used Gustave Flaubert in his *Flaubert's Parrot*, Rushdie the Indian language riots in *Midnight's Children*, and Ackroyd the six London churches designed by the famous architect Nicholas Hawksmoor in his *Hawksmoor*. The employed realistic conventions were, however, instantly to be subverted “from within precisely those conventions which they [were] clearly trying to undermine” thus presenting the novels “as documentary history *and* as artifice” (Lee 36), and casting a new light on the question of history. In Britain it was especially the postmodern 1980s that developed a particular fascination with the issue of history – history understood both as “event and process, and as account of events and processes” (Malcolm 13). This concern became, in fact, “the principal distinguishing feature of the decade's fiction . . . . This feature can be seen in a marked tendency of novels to return to a less than immediate past, and often to exhibit the generic markers of the historical novel” (Malcolm 13).

Out of numerous representatives of the 1980s decade, some of whom have already been mentioned, Jeanette Winterson undoubtedly deserves closer attention. Her novels are much preoccupied with the new historicist and

postmodernist problem of history – she undermines the stereotypical belief in the linearity of history proving that it rather loops, could be conveniently compared to a net, a cat's cradle, or a maze. Since history may be only accessible indirectly and in written form, she demonstrates to the readers the potential unreliability and subjectivity of any historical document. As written historical accounts are subject to the very same processes as fictional stories, Winterson compares them to works of fiction. What is more, when one takes into account the fact that historical records are invariably dependent on memory with its subjectivity and selectivity, the argument of the single monolithic history appears to be out of question. Furthermore, since history has been generally written down by men and about men, "her-story" might have varied considerably. Thus history can, by no means, be considered homogenous or objective. The analysis of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* is certainly enough to demonstrate convincingly that there is no single universal objective history.

People's lives "by their very true nature are myriad, fragmentary and kaleidoscopic. And I think cannot be best understood by a single narrative thread. ... For me, there's always something unsatisfactory about that," Winterson said in an interview with Margaret Reynolds (qtd. in Noakes 19). If plurality and fragmentation are referred to life and narration, then history, being nothing more than either people's lives and acts or the narrated account of both, cannot be considered as linear. Numerous events happening simultaneously will not "conform to the traditional linear model" into which they are often tried to be forced, as discovers Saleem, Rushdie's main character (Lee 48). To demonstrate this very same argument, *The Passion* uses two narrators – Henri and Villanelle, both of whom live in the era of the Napoleonic wars and tell their stories frequently mentioning dates. Important events in their lives often happen at the same time: in November 1804 Napoleon sends Henri back to Boulogne and Villanelle meets her future lover again; Henri spends Christmas with Patrick and other soldiers while Villanelle broods on her lover, who is with her husband; at New Year's Eve Henri drinks with Patrick stolen wine and Villanelle goes to look covertly at her lover through a window. "The very writing of history entails falsification, as it imposes a neat linearity ... on events that took place simultaneously" (Gašiorek 150–151). Gašiorek further quotes from Carlyle's *On History*:

It is not in acted, as it is in written History: actual events are nowise so simply related to each other as parent and offsprings are; every single event is the offspring not of one, but of all other events, prior or contemporaneous, and will in its turn combine with all others to give birth to new (150–151).

*Sexing the Cherry* likewise employs two narrators – the Dog-Woman and Jordan. However, the argument contradicting the linearity of history and time is additionally supported by the existence of the narrators' twentieth-century doubles – the woman chemist and Nicolas Jordan, whose lives, experiences and passions are extremely alike: the Dog-Woman and the chemist are both controversial figures in their times, the latter has visions of herself being a physically awkward person of a monstrous size – of being the Dog-Woman, both find or used to find the company of dogs the most enjoyable, and both meet Jordan/Nicolas. On the other hand, Jordan and Nicolas both share their fascination with ships, they both dream of travelling, and, finally, both of them manage to fulfil those dreams. Winterson writes "Time is a straight line" and "We can only be in one place at a time," and in a straightforward way labels the sentences with a single word "lies" (Winterson 1989, 90). Likewise, Jeanette, in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, remarks: "I have a theory that every time you make an important choice, the part of you left behind continues the other life you could have had" (169). The very existence of an inward life, memory, and a soul reinforces these claims:

The inward life tells us that 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 (Winterson 1989, 100).

Events cannot be arranged on a single temporal line and, therefore, other solutions have been adopted. History is repeatedly being compared to a looping narration, which goes back and leaps forward: "It goes in two directions at once. It goes backwards as it goes forwards. It loops. It takes detours," claims Crick in Swift's *Waterland* (qtd. in Lee 41). In *The Passion* Henri writes his memories from the perspective of some years. Winterson employs nearly the same device as Swift, and therefore, it may be excusable to use Lee's quotation concerning Crick:

while what he is narrating is his past, it is simultaneously the future which will unfold for the reader. It is so cleverly structured that the end of the novel is only mid way through the story. We know by the end of the novel that what happens after the final chapter is contained in the first few chapters which means, if we read circuitously, going back to the past (41–42).

The end of the main character's story is the moment when he is just about to sit down to write it, which happens at the beginning of the novel. What is more, Henri starts telling his story from the days of being in Napoleon's army; then moves back to his childhood; then returns to Bonaparte; then again goes back to his mother's childhood. Such an approach to narration

and history depends to a large extent on the qualities of human mind. Winterson wants to demonstrate that "the mind always travels and it travels dimensionally" (Winterson, qtd. in Noakes 20), that our minds are forever making associations moving in unpredictable directions. When Jordan asks Fortunata to leave her island and travel with him, she answers that "she need[s] not leave this island to see the world, she has seas and cities enough in her mind" (Winterson 1989, 113). Winterson maintains that

In a night 200,000 years can pass, time moving only in our minds. The steady marking of the seasons, the land well-loved and always changing continues outside, while inside light years revolve us under different skies (Winterson 1989, 152).

Such a journey is, obviously "not linear, it is always back and forth, denying the calendar, the wrinkles and lines of the body" (Winterson 1989, 87). In *Oranges* the writer continually disrupts the line of narration inserting fairy tales or Jeanette's dreams, which always, however, relate to the plot, and explains: "You can read *Oranges* in spirals... I don't really see the point of reading in straight lines. We don't think like that and we don't live like that. Our mental processes are closer to a maze than a motorway..." (qtd. in Palmer 101). In the very same novel she suggests that "history should be celebrated in its complexity" (qtd. in Head 100) as it is "like string full of knots. ... [and] the best you can do is admire the cat's cradle, and maybe knot it up a bit more" (Winterson 1985, 93).

Historical accounts, as it has already been mentioned, depend to a large extent on the qualities of human mind, and one of them is, beyond any doubt, memory, which is described by Malcolm as "a faculty and an activity obviously intimately connected with either form of history (the event or the account)" (169). It is memory that allows people to store the events in their minds, and it is memory that later helps them to recreate the witnessed incidents. However, it has to be appreciated that memory is, first and foremost, selective, and, thus, subjective. There are no two people that would remember the very same event in an exactly the same way, and with exactly the same details. Furthermore, even a single person's recollections hardly ever stay identical as they are subject to change in the course of time: "Time is a great deadener. People forget, get bored, grow old, go away" (Winterson 1985, 93). The evident fallibility of human memory is further foregrounded by Jordan, who, as an adult, broods over his past:

Did my childhood happen? I must believe it did, but I don't have any proof. ... There are others whom I could ask, but I would not count their word in a court of law. ... 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 (Winterson 1989, 102).

In *The Passion* this unreliability is illustrated by the fact that Henri, who may be called the novel's historiographer, writes down his memories no sooner than when he is in an asylum. As Pykett suggests, it is interesting that Winterson puts Henri, one of her few characters trying to write about their experiences during historical times, in a mental institution (55). At the beginning he gives an account of the period when he was Napoleon's cook, and then recounts the visits of his friends' and enemies' ghosts. It raises the question of the man's and his memories' reliability, and, above all, the trustworthiness of any historiographer. In *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, in turn, memory is referred to simply as "the imperfect ramblings of fools who will not see the need to forget" (94).

Written account, which is our main source of knowledge about history as past events, depends, apart from memory, on language as well. Therefore, the concept of objective monolithic history, here understood as text, seems to be out of question and can be easily undermined. According to Roland Barthes, the famous structuralist, historiography is trying to give an illusion that language is transparent. He expanded de Saussure's theory of the components of meaning – of the signifier (a written or spoken word) and the signified (the idea of the word in mind) by developing the concept of the referent (the thing in reality which is being referred to) and claimed that historiography is attempting to "make the impression that it is structured around only two, and not three elements [and] what is dropped is the signified" (Scheiber 8–9). Nevertheless, language is never transparent since signifiers never refer directly to the reality, but are invariably mediated through the signified (Scheiber 8–9). What is more, the signified is hardly ever the same for two different people: hearing the word "bird" one may picture it as a grey sparrow, the other as a multicoloured parrot. Thus, the plurality of word meaning appears to be unquestionable.

To "destabilise any notion of the transparency of language" (Grice and Woods 7), Jeanette Winterson often uses fantasy, and the most frequent device that she employs is the literalisation of metaphor. The example for this, which immediately follows Grice and Woods' observation, is the event when Henri is asked to break into Villanelle's former lover's house and recover her heart, which has been stolen from her. In spite of his doubts, the man obeys, and, to his surprise, finds the heart kept in a jar and brings it back only to become convinced he heard Villanelle swallowing it again (Grice and Woods 7). In *Sexing the Cherry* the metaphors of cruel words, words that can kill and dying of love are literalised. Rude and swear words escape and live on their own flying above a city Jordan once visits. They are said to have eaten one woman's mop and have bitten many people. One night two lovers whispering words of passion suffocate when the multitude of words does not manage to leave the room (11–13). On another occasion

Jordan visits yet another city, whose "entire population had been wiped out by love three times in a row" (80). The only pair that survives feels forced to decide that love should be made illegal under penalty of death, and from that moment making love is only allowed "for the purposes of childbearing" (80).

If language is not transparent, and if each account, be it oral or written, is based on words, which have plural meanings, then each and every historical fact is merely a linguistic construct and "no narrative ... has any factual contents. It only refers to itself or other narratives..." (Scheiber 10). Winterson does not fail to make the readers aware of these issues: "*The Passion* emphasizes the discursive and plural nature of all narratives and insists on the fact that *reality* may be endlessly rewritten because it is nothing but a linguistic construct" (Asensio). Henri writes a diary which includes his thoughts and feelings, as well as memories of people and events. He describes Napoleon, Joséphine, Boulogne, Paris and Venice, which all can be historically verified and therefore, he might be called a historiographer giving an objective account of his times. However, the diary is, in fact, a cleverly structured device to support the plurality of history. It is a linguistic construct existing in another linguistic construct – the novel *The Passion*. Moreover, Henri's Napoleon, Joséphine, Boulogne, Paris and Venice all are linguistic constructs since they are only accessible for the readers through the text of his diary and/or the novel. This, in turn, directs their attention to the fact that the people, the places and the events that belong to the past are forever mediated through a multiplicity of texts. It is also true for Charles I, John Tradescant, Cromwell and the seventeenth-century puritan London depicted by the Dog-Woman and Jordan in *Sexing the Cherry*.

When it is borne in mind that language is not transparent and the correspondence between the form of word and its meaning is arbitrary, as linguistic theorists prove (Lee 34), then it becomes evident that it is people who give meaning to words. Hayden White in *Poetyka Pisarstwa Historycznego* claims that historical situations are not inherently tragic, comic, or romantic, but depend on historians' choice of words, on how they want the situations to be perceived (85). Therefore, language can never be separated from ideology. Young Henri admires Napoleon, eagerly describes his speeches and the emperor himself. However, when the man becomes disappointed with his idol, he realizes and openly admits: "I invented Bonaparte" and compares him to "a myth ... of my own making" (Winterson 1988, 158). Winterson warns the readers, illustrating what may happen, when somebody's ideology and words are accepted literally or without any criticism: the Dog-Woman listens to a preacher, who is against the Puritans and Cromwell, saying their enemies have done much harm to England. He

mentions the Law of Moses: 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' and tells the listeners to "go in secret and quiet, and gouge out [their] enemies' eyes . . . , and deprive them of their teeth. . ." (Winterson 1989, 92). For the next meeting the woman brings a bag full of people's eyes and teeth shocking and disgusting all its participants. Another illustration can be found in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*: Jeanette is told by her neighbour that "she had unwittingly married a pig" and had not discovered that until it was too late (Winterson 1985, 71). The girl, having, in addition, read the fairy tale "Beauty and the Beast," starts having nightmares about marrying a 'beast', and suspecting any man with pink carnation or hairy arms of being a 'pig' or a 'beast.' This example might be challenged by the fact that Jeanette is only a young and naive child, but when the text is carefully examined and is not treated literally, it emerges as an allegory carrying hidden advice.

Since language is plural, the meaning of any text be it historical or fictional, is also entirely dependent on the individual's interpretation, and, frequently, there are as many interpretations as there are readers and/or writers:

When someone tells me what they heard or saw, I believe them, and I believe their friend who also saw, but not in the same way, and I can put these accounts together and I will not have a seamless wonder but a sandwich laced with mustard of my own (Winterson 1985, 95).

In Winterson's novels various utterly conflicting interpretations of events frequently clash with each other: Jordan, in *Sexing the Cherry*, first learns about Fortunata's escape from her sisters. It is only later that he manages to find the dancer and is told a different version of the very same story. In *The Passion* the two first person narrators comment on the very same events and there is hardly any similarity in their perceiving the world and experiencing the war – Henri's approach is rather emotional, and Villanelle's more practical; Henri and the French admire Napoleon while Villanelle's nation sees him from the point of view of an invaded country – as an oppressor; the priest from Henri's village "sacrilegiously talks about Bonaparte as if he were a new Messiah sent by God . . . [and when] Henri arrives at the camp at Boulogne, he cannot help comparing what the priest had told him with what he actually sees" (Asensio). None of these interpretations may be called truer or more objective. Winterson further stresses her point by demonstrating that even a single person will apprehend the same events in a distinctly varying way from the perspective of time. Henri takes notes as a direct witness and it is only later that he rethinks them to write them down:

*The Passion* presents the reader with two distinct voices, that of the optimistic young man who believes in the promising career of his Emperor and the subsequent flourishing of his country, and that of the grown-up man who has experienced all the abominations of war and becomes profoundly disappointed with Napoleon and history (Asensio).

Jordan, on the other hand, admits himself, that, with time, a person's own version of events tends to change. He believes that it, nonetheless, stays true: "When we get home, men and women will crowd round us and ask us what happened and every version we tell will be a little more fanciful. But it will be real..." (Winterson 1989, 115).

If people tend to interpret the same experiences and events in such contrasting manners, then their utterly different understanding of written texts appears to be unquestionable. It may be easily supported by the fact that

Since texts do not 'mean' by themselves, 'meaning' has to be brought to them by a shared creative process between text and reader. Each reader will bring to a text different, culturally and pedagogically determined knowledges, and thus interpret a text in a variety of ways (Lee 23–24).

The reflection of this argument is to be found in *Oranges* in both young and adult Jeanette's interpretations of the Bible stories, in her mother's deliberate misinterpretations of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, or, as it has already been mentioned, in *Sexing the Cherry* – when the Dog-Woman misunderstands the old Law of Moses saying: 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' Winterson acknowledges in an interview: "you can't hold onto your work once it's in the public domain and there is no such thing as a fixed text ... it's always changing under your hands and people find all sorts of things you didn't know were there" (qtd. in Grice and Woods 5). To make it more conspicuous, Winterson hardly ever leaves her stories open to a single interpretation only. The fantasy elements and sections, the new versions of legends and the books of the Bible are always complex, ambiguous, and multilayered, and thus, invite "a number of alternative interpretations ..., [and] open themselves to a plurality of readings ..." (Grice and Woods 3).

Since people perceive and interpret events in varying ways, written historical accounts will also vary from each other. Furthermore, as historians' work is generally tantamount to searching for information in documents and such varying texts, each of them will only be able to interpret other historians' interpretations, and to create only one of the possible pictures of history – partly rewritten and partly their own. Jordan maintains: "there was no history that would not be rewritten" (Winterson 1989, 152), and Lévi-Strauss remarks in one of his essays, how astonished a person from another planet would be, if he read thousands of works on the French

Revolution – although all of them give an account of the same period of time, and of the same places, still they differ considerably focusing on and omitting varying events (White 2000, 93). White also mentions Berel Lang, the Professor of Humanities writing on Holocaust, who maintains that each subject may be introduced in countless ways, that there are no limitations to that, and any possibilities are acceptable here (White 2000, 225).

Winterson, in the analysed novels, rewrites the events of the Napoleonic wars and of the times of Cromwell's republic, the fairy tales of Cinderella and Beauty and the Beast, the Arthurian legend and the Grail quest, and in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* not only does she reinvent the romance of Romeo and Juliet, but also reinterprets the most important authority in the Christian world – the Bible: using the titles of the books of the Old Testament as the titles of her chapters, she rewrites it to tell the history of a partly fictitious and partly autobiographical character Jeanette. The main function of these 'new' stories is to underline the fact that "everyone who tells [or writes] a story tells it differently, just to remind us that everybody sees it differently" (Winterson 1985, 93). This claim appears to complement the observations of Lévi-Strauss and Lang. If the views of all the three writers are taken into consideration, it may be argued that *The Passion* is one of the versions on the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, and *Sexing the Cherry* one on Cromwell's revolution, that in these novels Winterson offers the readers her own rewritten interpretation of those times. Each and every text is just a story, as she explains, and "all texts work off other texts. It's a continual rewriting and rereading of what has gone before . . . . There's interpretation as well as creation in everything that happens with books" (qtd. in Noakes 18–19) and history.

History as text is repeatedly being compared to a book of fiction, and put on the same plane as storytelling by Winterson:

People like to separate storytelling which is not fact from history which is fact. . . . This is very curious. How is it that no one will believe that the whale swallowed Jonah, when every day Jonah is swallowing the whale? (Winterson 1985, 93).

All of the three analysed novels mix historical and/or realistic events with elements of fantasy. *Sexing the Cherry* describes the seventeenth-century London, Charles I, and the monstrous Dog-Woman, a dancing city, and flying princesses. In *The Passion* Henri writes about Napoleon's wars, France, the winter in Russia, and about Villanelle's webbed feet, her walking on the surface of water, and swallowing her own heart. The main character of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* is Jeanette, an adopted girl, who is raised by Pentecostal Evangelists, who knows the Old Testament nearly by

heart, and writes sermons. The very same information can be found in any biographical note concerning Jeanette Winterson. The conclusion is that the novel is partly autobiographical. However, it is more than ambiguous where the life story of Jeanette Winterson ends and the story of fictional Jeanette begins. The boundaries between history and fiction, fact and invention are thus destroyed.

Likewise, Hayden White compares history with fiction proving that the writing of history is subject to the same processes as the writing of fiction. Historians face problems similar to the ones writers are forced to tackle: first of all, they have to decide which events are to be described and which omitted – the subject is selected. A book on French revolution may be either more or less detailed, just as a novel may focus primarily on Napoleon's love of chicken, be his passion imaginative or factual. This selection of material is conspicuous in Winterson's novels: *The Passion* devotes no attention whatsoever to any details of Napoleon's most famous battles and even more infamous defeat at Waterloo; *Sexing the Cherry* offers no reasons for the beheading of Charles I and no explanation how Cromwell became that powerful; *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, as Cosslett notices, reinventing the legend of the Round Table, ignores the subject of adultery between Lancelot and Guinevere (21), and, reinterpreting Ruth's story, omits the theme of marriage to Boaz and the birth of their son (17). In the same novel, having briefly recounted a story, Winterson comments: "Of course that is not the whole story, but that is the way with stories; we make them what we will" (Winterson 1985, 93).

Since the sources of knowledge about the past are always incomplete, historical narratives are merely "verbal artifacts," and, to a large extent, products of invention (White 2000, 79–80). White also observes:

It is sometimes said that the aim of the historian is to explain the past by "finding," "identifying," or "uncovering" the "stories" that lie buried in chronicles; and that the difference between "history" and "fiction" resides in the fact that the historian "finds" his stories, whereas the fiction writer "invents" his. This conception of the historian's task, however, obscures the extent to which "invention" also plays a part in the historian's operations (White 1973, 6–7).

He supports this claim by presenting an example of such an event as a king's death. It may be either a beginning or a transitional event or an ending in a story, which gives a possibility of creating three different stories by assigning different functions to the death of the ruler. In a chronicle "this event is simply 'there' ...; it does not 'function' as a story element" (White 1973, 7). A hierarchy of significance is thus introduced – a hierarchy, which is artificially imposed, and, undeniably, invented by a given historian. Moreover, to make a story comprehensible, he needs to explain "How did

that happen?", "What happened next?" or "Why did things happen this way rather than that?" (White 1973, 7). An effort of imagination is more than frequently required both to answer such questions and to fit facts into a narrative: "And when I look at a history book and think of the imaginative effort it has taken to squeeze this oozing world between two boards and typeset, I am astonished" (Winterson 1985, 95). Having analysed White's arguments, Scheiber similarly remarks: "The material which facts are made of lies beyond the scope of language, because to speak about it, and put it into words, means to emplot" (13), to construct a linear narrative. Furthermore, such a narrative requires a narrator, consists of a beginning, a middle, and an end (White 1973, 5), and possesses a climax and a conclusion with frequent moralistic judgements (White 2000, 165, 168). Thus, any written historical account resembles a work of fiction as all these features are primary characteristics of fictional stories.

The above mentioned selection of the material which is to be included in a historical narrative inevitably leads to the omission of certain facts (Lévi-Strauss, qtd. in White 2000, 94); some events can only be transformed into a narrative at the expense of some others (White 2000, 83). In general, historical texts have been written by men, whose choice was to write about the actions of men, forcing women's history into oblivion. It may be argued that historical accounts written by women would vary considerably in terms of the selected material, concentrating not only on women themselves, the emotional sphere of life, and domestic activities, but also on all the people marginalized by male historiographers, such as criminals, prostitutes, gays, lesbians, and on the cruelty suffered by animals. Joyce observes that female novelists, and Winterson among others,

focus on the subordinate and powerless position of women in the past and draw in aspects of history which have been hitherto denied – the emotional, the illogical, the feelings behind the events rather than the events themselves.

Joyce subsequently illustrates her observations with a description of Henri's feelings towards Napoleon, the reasons for following him, Henri's and other soldiers' blind love for the great emperor regardless of any hardships and lost battles, and concludes that such emotions are "neglected in traditional history." Henri, although he appears to be one of many male historiographers, chooses to write about feelings rather than mere facts (Joyce). He begins his diary saying: "It was Napoleon who had such a passion for chicken..." and "He liked no one except Joséphine and he liked her the way he liked chicken" (Winterson 1988, 3), and the very same first page describes Bonaparte's favourite horse and his dislike of tall servants. Winterson's choice of the novel's title itself – "The Passion" – is telling enough.

Emotions were also not unknown in the seventeenth-century London, although this fact may not be easily found in a historical book: the Dog-Woman falls in love for the first time, finds a baby in the Thames and decides to raise it, moves to Wimbledon for the boy's sake, and waits impatiently, as a mother does, for Jordan to come home from his journeys with the famous traveller and gardener to royalty – John Tradescant. The Dog-Woman admits that she hates the Puritans, and, when the king is to be beheaded, she admires his composure, other people weep, and tears in Tradescant's eyes can be seen:

The King appeared in his linen shirt, his beard trimmed and nothing of him shivering, though many a spectator had fainted with cold. He knelt down and rested his head on the block, and I saw Tradescant's face stream with tears that froze at once and lay on his cheeks like diamonds. The King gave the signal, and a moment later his head was wrapped in a white cloth and his body was carried away (Winterson 1989, 75).

The subject of prostitutes, brothels, lesbians, rape, or maltreatment of animals is also hardly ever, if at all, raised in historical narratives. As lesbians, prostitutes, and animals as well, were generally considered as “abject or subhuman” (Merleau 86), they were forced into the oblivion of time. It is, however, Winterson who

is concerned with the vanished of history and the dual violences of the damage done to them and of the effacement of that damage. ... [She is concerned with] the chickens, the prostitutes, the criminalized poor. The violence of their deaths, their subjection to appetite, and their poverty and criminalization are exposed, while the erasure of these violences from history [and] from memory ... is retraced (Merleau 90).

*The Passion* provides an example of maltreatment of birds before they are killed for meat – the emperor's chickens are mutilated by cutting off their beaks and claws, and kept in small cages. *Sexing the Cherry* as well as *The Passion* offer numerous descriptions of brothels, the conditions of living inside, and the brutal ways in which the women are treated there. Even Napoleon's soldiers have their own brothel with its “workers” ironically called the *vivandières*, who are given the worst food, poor pay, and are made to work as long as the soldiers wish. They belong to the lowest social class, as they are “runaways, strays, younger daughters of too-large families, servant girls who'd got tired of giving it away to drunken masters, and fat old dames who couldn't ply their trade anywhere else” (Winterson 1988, 38). Villanelle likewise is a woman coming from the lower class, which makes her unimportant as a person, and defenceless against rape. Having no better prospects for the future, she marries a man, who later sells her “with the other meat, to Napoleon's army” to work as a prostitute (Merleau 99). Merleau thus demonstrates the insignificance of women – in particular of low status, and widespread violence inflicted on them. Had women been

allowed to narrate past events, it is more than likely that historical texts would devote much attention to such subjects as discussed above. Therefore, any claims to history being universal or objective may be easily challenged.

History as past events and as text is entirely dependent on humans, and if their lives are not orderly by nature but fragmentary, their acts have countless complex motives and produce as numerous unpredictable effects, then history – humans' past acts – will not be forced into a single cause and effect line. Furthermore, memory and language are not capable of providing a uniform account of historical events, which, in turn, leads to varying and often contradicting interpretations. Each human being is unique and experiences the world and texts about its past in a unique way. As both historical and fictional books undergo similar processes when they are written, they both should be treated on a par, as a medium providing only one of the possible interpretations of the past, especially when it is taken into consideration that women's version of the past would differ substantially. However, Winterson is far from making her readers challenge all historical documents or even deny any historical knowledge. On the contrary, she wants people to see the world imaginatively, in a different light, to understand the fluidity of history and, what is more, acknowledge the fact that there is no single objective history but an infinite number of subjective non-linear (hi)stories.

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## Subiektywne nielinearne historie w powieściach Jeanette Winterson

Czy zapis historyczny jest obiektywny, wyczerpujący, niezależny od człowieka, ideologii, pamięci i płci?

Autorka odpowiada na te pytania na przykładzie wybranych powieści (*Nie tylko pomarańcze...*, *Namiętność*, *Płeć wiśni*, *Zapisane na ciele*) współczesnej pisarki brytyjskiej Jeanette Winterson. Podważa ona stereotypowe myślenie, iż historia jest linearna, dowodząc, że tak naprawdę historia zapętała się i może być porównywana raczej do sieci czy labiryntu, niż do

