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Creating Reality: Representation and Reflexivity in
Jeanette Winterson's *Seeing the Cherry*, *Written on the Body*, and *Art & Lies*

Frances Slingerland

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

English

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
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Abstract

Creating Reality: Representation and Reflexivity in Jeanette Winterson's *Saving the Cherry*, *Written on the Body*, and *Art & Lies*

Frances Slingerland

Jeanette Winterson's fiction is, among other things, an example of a postmodern convergence of genres based on enactments of the subject's interpellation and relative freedom in a cultural context. Her work (re)creates the multiplicity of identifying influences and resistances that confront us, and our abilities to choose between these to varying degrees. This study contrasts Winterson's narrative technique with that of realism, as defined by Elizabeth Emarth in her *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel*. By rejecting realism's objective time, and its particular means of connoting futurity and of determining character identity, Winterson's practice resolutely resists the requirements of realism. The absence of a unifying narrator in Winterson's fiction prevents consensus from forming, thereby breaking down mechanisms of past-tense narration and realistic style. The writer, character/narrators, and reader must all become active players in the making of the (fictional) world. Winterson's work questions the objectivity of reality and proposes a world of interlocking identities where individuals are at once culturally determined, and free to create their own realities.

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Creating Reality: Representation and Reflexivity¹ in
Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry*, *Written on the Body*, and *Art & Lies*

1 Realism: The Invisible Art

1.1 Introduction

The epigraph to Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* asks the question "What does this say about the reality of the world?." The reader proceeds to the opening narrative section of the novel and finds in it a fictional world unfolding in all its complexity. The three novels I look at in this study all provide ambiguous answers to the question "what is the relationship between perception, art, and reality?." In a wide range of styles and narrative techniques, Winterson does some battle with realism, setting up and taking on its most basic assumptions and calling them lies:

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

Lie 2: Time is a straight line.

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

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

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

Lie 6: Reality as something which can be agreed upon.

Lie 7: Reality as truth.

(*Sexing the Cherry* 83)

However, Winterson also uses *realistic* technique in her fiction. Blending modes of fantasy, allegory, poetry, visionary prophesy, epic, and dystopian science fiction, she achieves a Felliniesque world of images, broken plot, and dream.

My studies of theories of realism began with George Eliot, the reading of her novels, her philosophical writing and translations. I set out to find theorists who combined an interest in the intricate narrative structures of realism with an investigation of its ontological presuppositions. Jeanette Winterson is a author of my own time who is like George Eliot in one respect: she takes an impassioned interest in contemporary assumptions about "reality" and "art." Winterson resists current ontological assumptions to the point where her resistance informs the structure of her work. Elizabeth Ermarth has published a study of realistic narrative called *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel*. Based on an extensive study of historiography, and the history of art, mathematics, geometry, and philosophy, Ermarth's analysis provides one framework in which to distinguish realistic style, and she suggests that, in some radical ways, contemporary fiction is moving beyond that framework. Her work explores how modern thinking on the nature of knowledge has changed the way we (re)create human experience in the novel. In taxonomizing the characteristics of realism as distinct from other styles, Ermarth points to those less realistic styles. "Artists can choose to distort or to abandon realistic consistencies for purposes of their own, and in so doing produce not bad works, but only unrealistic, or partially realistic ones" (*Realism* 58). Ermarth's effort has never been anti-realist, and she finds "both referential and reflexive functions at work in realism" (*Realism* xiii).

The ways in which Winterson circumvents and reinvents realistic practice, and the effects those innovations have on the reading experience, are the topics of the study that follows. My effort is to discover the ways Winterson points to her own, the reader's, and her fictional characters' roles in creating the fictional reality of her novels, and even of what we call the "real world." In "Burnt Norton," T.S. Eliot expresses the continual symbiosis of the real and our understanding of it: "What might have been and what has been / Point to one end, which is always the present" (9-10). Though "what might have been is an abstraction" (6), it is a garden of the imagination which we explore as intently as we do our "actual past." Once our experiences are past, both past and imagined realities remain in the flux of our impressions, and contribute to our beliefs and memory with which we interpret life. It is in this reflexive world of impression that Winterson opens up some fundamental epistemological questions about the nature of space, time, and event--"objective reality"--and their rendering in fiction. We know that, in one way or another, and among other things, *Saving the Cherry* is a reading of *Four Quartets* (*Art Objects* 118). There is no question that Winterson respects her literary "ancestors," and that she considers that she "cannot do new work without known work" (*Art Objects* 172). Because the motive of my study is Winterson's questioning of epistemological givens, I will concentrate on a few of her works in detail rather than try to "cover" postmodern narrative in general, which would quickly exhaust the scope of this study and, surely, of my knowledge.

Ermarth is a theorist who has not confined herself to strictly semiotic readings of realism (which tend to be anti-realistic). She has drawn from "various critical

approaches--history of ideas, phenomenological and reader-response criticism, formalism, semiotics, and structuralism." However, her "method or vocabulary [does not] belong exclusively to any of these" (*Realism* xii). Ermarth's 1983 (and ongoing) theories about realism provide the method for this study. In the first chapter then, I will outline her analysis of realism in more detail.

1.2 Ermarth and Realism

Ermarth has concerned herself with a rift that seems to have appeared between representational art and more reflexive practice.

As far as I know, it is nobody's ambition to establish an exclusively semiotic linguistic practice; but to emphasize the semiotic helps to demonstrate how far gone we are on the road to the other extreme. An exclusively symbolic literary theory masks the semiotic function in order to encode a supposed transcendence which is really a function of linguistic habits. What Kristeva's theory rejects is not at all the symbolic disposition of language but only such disrupted representational or symbolic practices and the theories they imply. This extends by implication to narrative and, perhaps more importantly, to the interpretation of narrative that has emphasized meaning and signification at the expense of semiotic and reflexive value. Such disrupted practices do not merely obscure the full range of value in literature, they disturb the renewal of social codes; in other words, they block a moral process and often in the name of morality. (Ermarth, "Conspicuous" 349)

Ermarth is not concerned with establishing a new reflexive bias, but seeks to find the cracks in literal and referential writing and to restore the historical and connotative to textual analysis. "It is not a question of elevating play over meaning, as meaning was once emphasized at the expense of play; it is not a question of 'revolution'--that modern concept--but instead, of retrieving into practice, into play, a dimension of language that has been repressed" (*Sequel* 139). She finds this dimension in realism itself, and also, especially, in modern fiction (most recently in Cortázar, Robbe-Grillet, and Nabokov). But it is not only the fiction and its new techniques that provide an altered object of study, but the analysis itself that can change what is of interest. The strictest realistic practice itself can be read for its reflexivity. There can be no doubt that reflexive writers such as Calvino, or Winterson, draw attention to the instability of the "real world out there" by drawing attention to and valorizing the fact that so much of that world lies in our interpretation. Winterson takes up this refrain over and over in her writing, pressing both reader and writer into a creative act.

Ermarth has provided a key or code with which to observe the referential novelist at work. She deals especially with the epistemological assumptions of realistic narrative and the technical devices required to uphold these beliefs. Fundamental to Ermarth's approach is her questioning of the originator of the "reality" portrayed in realistic narrative. According to Ermarth, "reality" in realistic fiction is created from a consensus suggested by the text. The writer creates a narrative consciousness (which expresses itself in the voice of the narrator) that creates a world plausible to--and that contains within it the potential agreement of--a larger group of contemporary readers.

[D]espite all differences in expression, the basic activity of the past-tense narrator is the same: a confirmation of collective experience, literally a recollection of all points of view and of all private times under the aegis of a single point of view and in a common time.

The objectivity of the picture resulting from such a linear narrative thus depends on a collection of voices for which the narrator acts as a kind of administrator, coordinating the novel's various moments into a single sequence that confirms the mutual relevance of one moment for another. The consensus not only establishes an agreement of meanings; it literally establishes the *continuity of time*. This *continuity in time*, common sense might object, is what makes collective agreements possible. What I'm urging is that the reverse is true: that collective agreement makes historical continuity possible. (*Realism* 54)

This is to question the very basis of realistic narrative: that realistic narrative describes an objective reality which, if we were truly omniscient, we would all agree on, because it exists without us. It is to question what George Eliot called "nature and fact." "The faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in [the mind of the writer]" is at the heart of realism (*Bede* 221). While Eliot qualifies this process of writing as a reflection, explaining that it is "sometimes . . . disturbed," the "reflection faint or confused," her conviction that there is a rule, or law, of what has happened is confirmed by her use of a legal metaphor at the end of the same paragraph: "I feel as much bound to tell you, as precisely as I can, what that reflection is, as if I were in a

witness-box narrating my experience on oath."

I begin, then, with this particular disparity between representational art--which believes in an objective world that must be represented at all costs in order to do it justice--and a fiction which challenges that belief--not so much to destroy it as to problematize it and open up interpretive possibilities.² The term *reflexivity* which I have been using, means, for the purposes of this study, the quality of a narrative to point to its own artifice, its own creation of the reality it presents. According to Emarth, one of realism's most important self-imposed tasks is the maintenance of a consensus of what a plausible reality is. And, "to the extent that all points of view summoned by the text agree, to the extent that they converge upon the 'same' world, that text maintains the consensus of realism" (*Realism* x). In realistic fiction, the artificiality of the created world is, as much as possible, kept from the reader's view. Emarth outlines the devices by which a novelist creates the illusion of reality, thereby reinforcing its "existence" ³

The device which brings together the disparate views of individual characters and creates a consistent reality is past-tense narration. Emarth claims that "a realistic novel . . . can *only* be written in the past tense." The narrative consciousness looks backward from within a future time, outside the one in which the events of the novel take place, but to which--we understand--they will lead; the narrative consciousness calls to mind events as history. The narrator is not usually a terribly well defined person in his/her narrative incarnation, even if we see plenty of him/her in the events of the story. The given diegetic moment, as told from a future point beyond the story's confines, holds the immediacy of the present, as well as that "already understood,"

resolved feeling:

The momentary present is given both as emergent--in its concrete, actual appearance, in its precarious aspect; and also as contained already in a larger pattern of significance where it has become past and fixed, at least from the point of view of the implied consciousness narrating it . . . at every moment in the present story we are continuously aware of the future. . . . The narrating consciousness exists in the same temporal continuum as the action, but outside the arbitrary frame, in the future to which this present action will eventually (has already) led . . . (*Realism* 41)

The 19th century empirical mind sought rational explanations for experience, ones that could be contained within human consciousness. The conscious recollection and gathering function of consensus is what distinguishes Ermarth's idea from one that imagines realistic consensus as an unspoken conspiracy or a collective unconscious. The conscious mind is crucial in Ermarth's reading. Without it, the narrative consciousness, and the characters within the novel cannot recall the details that bring them to an "accurate" or "true" remembrance of things past. "The consciousness available to consensus in realism always depends upon distance and memory and thus upon the conscious formulation that these imply" (*Realism* 77). A pretence is often set up that the narrator too must accurately remember what happened.

Consciousness itself is the medium in which the dynamic of what Ermarth calls "temporal perspective" must occur for realistic narrative to achieve its consensus-

gathering effect. Using the analogy of visual perspective in painting and its coming into prominence with the Renaissance, Ermarth explains that "[w]hat the faculty of sight is to space, the faculty of consciousness is to time," and that

narrative perspective maintains a similar continuity *in time* [to that which perspective maintains in painting], and thus establishes a similar potential for agreement among multiple consciousnesses, that the implied spectator [of realistic painting] establishes among multiple spatial points of view. . . . The realistic narrator's function, like that of the implied spectator in painting, is to homogenize the medium" (*Realism* 40).

It is to this device of past-tense narration that Ermarth devotes much of her theory. The mechanisms of past-tense narration themselves are the points of reference I will use for my textual work in the chapters that follow. Past-tense narration requires several important epistemological assumptions, including (1) that time is a single continuum; (2) that temporal continuities extend beyond the arbitrarily limited horizons of the text; (3) that events point beyond themselves to a coordinating system; and (4) that appearances are but aspects of hidden identities, which can be revealed only in a series of instances (*Realism* 42).

First of all then, without the maintenance of temporal continuity the differing experiences of individuals cannot be held to be those of the same world. In a world where time is continuous, "the reader is led to discover the systematic rules of

transformation that explain how events proceed from each other, rather than focus on discrete events" (Ermarth, *Realism* 41-42). Ermarth argues that "the conception of time as a common medium in which distinctions between past, present, and future are meaningful (i.e., mutually informative) is a conception predicated by realistic narrative as well as confirmed by it" (41). By identifying this as a characteristic particular to realism, linear time is no longer seen as universal. Ermarth states elsewhere that "[l]inear time is an artifice. It is, for better or worse, one of the massive achievements of Western culture, and as such is a profoundly collective construct." It is "not only generally . . . an artifice with important historical and ideological boundaries, but also specifically . . . the collective construct that valorizes collective constructs" ("Solitude" 42).

In the world of a realistic novel, the length of a diegetic minute must remain universal for events described to be those of the same world and, given that the sameness of the world is important to the portrayal of acceptable individual experience, the universality of time cannot be questioned. The realistic narrator will not draw attention to varied experiences of this objective time without immediately reassuring the reader of time's universality in spite of particular experience. Despite Dickens's temporal jumping around in, for example, *Our Mutual Friend*, the reader comes to understand which of the linearly described scenes are concurrent and the linear sequence of others. In fact, our getting the sequence in the right order is critical to our finding the key to John Harmon's identity. The reader must draw a single abstract timeline, to which each described scene can be pinned where it belongs. Though the events

may not be narrated chronologically, we eventually find the time of the story to be linear and continuous.⁴

The second of Ermarth's "presuppositions of past-tense narration" assumes that the world continues as it is in a story at least until the time when the narrator sits down to write the tale, if not to the point where it is read: virtual and actual time must be seen as continuous. By existing "in a time by convention coextensive with that of the represented time" but "outside the frame of events" (40), the narrator creates a sense of futurity to which the reader must extend his/her imagination. "Futurity provides that horizon and that vanishing-point which at once mark the (arbitrary) limits of our perception and guarantee the extension beyond those limits of the order visible in the field" (42). "The hope of closure that makes the whole enterprise of consciousness worthwhile is contained in the existence of future possibility" (52-53).

The role played by the narrator is to pose as someone within the actual world of the reader who has also seen the fictional world. The narrator is the bridge which proves that the fictional world is as "real" as the reader's world. Realism does not question the "reality" of the reader's everyday life (or at least his/her methods of interpreting that reality). Rather, realism takes the reader's reality for granted, and finds a mechanism whereby the fictional world can be seen to be co-extensive with the reader's experience; it gains its authority from the presuppositions inherent in the way in which readers establish the reality of their lives.

The third assumption of past-tense narration that Ermarth identifies is that its

events must point beyond themselves to a coordinating system. "By successfully coordinating apparently disparate elements, the realistic novelist asserts the existence of a common ordering system; apparently unrelated particulars sooner or later reveal a connectedness" (*Realism* 57). An event in realistic narrative is not primarily of value in itself, but is seen as a manifestation of moral or physical laws.⁵ While empiricism sought particularly to avoid the "unreality" of abstracted truth, and to present things in their full concreteness, nevertheless--with the influence of romantic transcendentalism--there was a tendency to seek a resonance between them and the higher order of the universe.

Within the humanistic tradition of realistic narrative that Ermarth traces through the Renaissance--one that is particularly evident in George Eliot's novels--the individual will is intrinsically caught up in event. The causal tie between event and character is close. We are not in a universe of phenomenologically caused events, one in which everything, from the weather to divine providence, DNA, the human subconscious, and what the man down the street had for breakfast, contribute to the cause of an event. There is no question here of events happening fatalistically, or out of arbitrary or cultural environmental influence and formation; nor is it a question of the narrator or author obviously manipulating characters against their apparent "free will" to conform to a plot. This is not to say that Eliot and her narrators do *not* do this, but they would never dream of drawing attention to it or showing off about it. Individual will (represented in the character's motives and desires) and collective agreement (represented in the narrative consciousness, and the public consensus it voices) are

presented as independent (though they may be presented to be in agreement "by default," especially when a character is a "good guy" and does things according to society's expectations).

For Eliot's narrative to give a truly humanist representation of life, the characters must *appear* to act of their own volition. A person is certainly not presented as being who s/he is through the vagaries of social circumstances. A character's choices—at least ostensibly—*cause* events to come about. The will of an individual must appear to be of his/her own making. "In the realistic universe people have to recognise that their identity depends upon themselves and their actions, rather than on family, class, or some such 'mark' of identity that has nothing to do with their wills or self-consciousness" (Ermarth, *Realism* 55). It is not "by the grace of God" only that one gets through, but by the individual's willed choice.

This drama of human choice directing events is one of George Eliot's most elaborately crafted themes. In *Middlemarch* it is clearly Lydgate's infatuation with Rosamond that later causes him to relinquish the high aims that drove him in his younger years. His tendency (his "tragic flaw"?) to fall for beautiful and deadly women is foreshadowed by his desperate affair with the French actress. In *Adam Bede*, Arthur Dunnithorne's inability clearly to decide on a course of action itself creates the tragedy of the novel, and it is on that "typical" indecision that Eliot's defence of realism in chapter 17 rests ("In which the Story Pauses a Little"). The fatal consequences of wrong choices are also the subject of *The Lifted Veil*, in which Latimer finds—only after he marries—the revealed heart of his lover to contain but "the light floating vanities of the

girl defining themselves into the systematic coquetry, the scheming selfishness, of the woman" (49).

There is a uniquely radical-Protestant nature to this "salvation" by right choices. The implication is that we are truly free to choose and that our choices determine our virtue. Therefore, since Adam Bede chooses not to "be see-saw about anything" (212) and always stands by the right choices, he is virtuous. Because Arthur Dunnithorne and Fred Vincy cannot see themselves, and cannot choose to act deliberately, they fall into *bad* behaviour, with all its dire consequences. Esther, in *Felix Holt*, chooses to give up her Transome fortune for the sake of a future that is morally more noble than it might otherwise have been. The freedom to choose required in realistic narrative also implies that a clear choice is available.

There can be complications. Mr. Lyon, in *Felix Holt*, regrets that "human things" are "perplexed, whereby, right action seems to bring evil consequences, if we have respect only to our own brief lives, and not to that larger rule whereby we are stewards of the eternal dealings, and not contrivers of our own success" (468). To avoid this confusion of consequences, it is necessary to "divest" oneself of all "personal considerations" (572). "We interpret signs . . . often quite erroneously, unless we have the right key to what they signify", warns the narrator (590). Again, a "clear and objective view" of the situation, as it "truly" happened, is required to see things as they are and make the right choices. By correctly remembering, and placing together the evidence, by his "truthful speech" (564) and his virtue (as attested by Esther), Felix is freed at the end of the novel.

Well after the event (time enough for the "narrator" to find a pen?), a whole hierarchy of justification is invented in which to place a given occurrence: a systematic deduction is made neatly to bolster belief in natural order. It might seem that a "natural order" is a concept opposed to that of humanistic free will. In fact—and this is precisely the contradiction of realistic fiction that Ermarth points out—realistic convention, while apparently champion of individual free will, demands that a character choose correctly from a limited range of options. The author and narrator create the impression of free will so that *when* characters seem to "choose" to act in a certain way, their actions confirm a hierarchy of virtues and values in which they seem "naturally" to fit. Ermarth is careful to point out that the apparent free will of realistic characters--the key to human "individuality" in realistic fiction--in fact leads to the fulfilment of a natural order and to that "strength of character" that leads an individual into "the right path." The underlying assumption is that true freedom gives the person the chance to choose "righteousness" or the devil, and that a true freedom in "realistic" narrative will necessarily lead to "the narrow," right, or orderly way. When Dorothea chooses Casaubon, it is made clear that her vision is clouded (the "veil" has not yet lifted), and she cannot see clearly or make the right choices. When Eliot's Adam Bede is stalwart, and Arthur Dunnithorne not, it is clear that Adam recognizes "the truth" (of a social code), and that Arthur does not. Perhaps "the reflection [is] faint or confused" (*Bede* 221).

Because of the linear and chronological nature of reading, any novel's characters will

always be shown to us in a series of circumstances that must be pieced together in the mind of a reader. Ermarth points to the radical differences that result from the various ways in which a reader can be encouraged to piece together the identity of a character. Realistic narrative encourages the reader to build bridges of consistency over time. One seeks to confirm a character type by a particular character's ability to remain the same in a series of situations that are bound within objective time. It is therefore the job of the narrator to draw the time-line and emphasize that the character acts in a way that is consistent with either a type, or a pattern of growth. Character A begins as thoughtless, and we expect character A to become either enlightened, or continue as the thoughtless boor. Dempster, the thoughtless boor of Eliot's "Janet's Repentance" in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, remains unrepentant; though the text holds out for his reformation, he literally drives himself over the brink. Again, although realism appears to sanction and reproduce free will and the individual's ability to make choices, consistency is artificial and typologies *are* reaffirmed.

Ermarth's analysis makes possible an awareness of the abstraction of narrative voice, and this in turn allows the reader of her work to detect in realistic fiction the abstraction of identity in realistic portrayal of character. Certain rules of narrative exist for the portrayal of realistic character that permit us to come to an understanding of the personalities at play in a novel. Failure to follow realistic conventions regarding identity can have radical consequences for the portrayal of character. Ermarth takes us through some of the important rules that realism requires in terms of identity. In speaking of *realistic identity*, she uses the term

to mean the oneness or the invariant structure by which we recognize a thing, by which we judge it under varying conditions to be the same. . . . This conception of identity, with all it implies about the regularity of nature and the possibilities of knowledge, belongs to an empirical epistemology that was relatively unimportant to the Middle Ages, and is being radically modified today; but it was current throughout the otherwise diverse period from the Renaissance through the nineteenth century. It is a conception of identity so obvious to us that we have ceased to see it as the convention it is, but . . . it took a long time to become common sense. (*Realism* 5)

Beginning again with realistic painting, Ermarth explains that "the identity of objects can only be implied from a series of implied viewpoints and can be fully grasped only as an abstraction from immediate experience" (18). In realistic narrative, the distance between these viewpoints is temporal, rather than spatial. Characters and objects "reveal uniformities that constitute identity. . . . and the inner identity can only be revealed through the similitudes that appear in consecutive instances" (18). The series of instances Ermarth speaks of must exist in an objective past and must give the illusion of occurring in linear sequence. "Realistic characters have depths that can never be expressed in one action, nor fully understood except as an abstraction of consciousness. This power of understanding . . . belongs mainly to the narrator" (64). Ermarth goes so far as to say that this series of like aspects is the "identifying form" in realism (48).

By discovering characters to be consistent over a period of time, the reader may come to some conclusions about them. We note this in George Eliot's writing, where a

character like Adam Bede is so consistent as to make one tire of descriptions of his virtue. Again and again the fine Adam is served up: there can be no mistaking his absolutely flawless behaviour. But this is so that we have absolutely no doubt, in the face of Arthur Dunnithorne's profligacy, that the man of lower rank is *not* at fault, that there can be no question of it. By the time Arthur gets himself into trouble the reader has long understood Adam's virtue: it has become a feature of his identity. It is this gathering of evidence, and the final result: in fact, an abstract category or characteristic that begins to define Adam, that Ermarth is referring to when she speaks of similitudes that appear in consecutive instances.

Real, or essential identity, then, is hidden and must be sought out by further reading. There is also a distinction to be made "between secondary and essential properties of objects or persons" (Ermarth, *Realism* 24). Some are ephemeral; some do not contribute to the effort of identifying something lasting, and some do. But even more important than the consistent characteristics themselves of any given character, is that effort to find the "connective tissue." Qualities or characteristics of one character in a novel tend to be marginal, discardable, and idiosyncratic (49), while the deeper connective effort--the way in which the narrative consciousness seeks to tie those characteristics together (be it of a character, or a town, or an object)--is emphasized. "The important constant in realistic fiction at all levels is maintaining a tension between the centripetal [which in this case Ermarth is identifying with the public narratorial voice] and the centrifugal impulses [the multiplicity of particular voices]" (49). In George Eliot's writing, the narrator might draw attention to repeated behaviour just in

case the reader missed it, explaining the character's virtue from a third party's perspective. The character him/herself may contribute, as Adam does: "[I]t isn't my way to be see-saw about anything: I think my fault lies th'other way. When I've said a thing, if it's only to myself, it's hard for me to go back" (Eliot, *Bede* 212). This kind of objective awareness is characteristic of the more virtuous characters of realistic fiction. Their vision is closer to the consensus that the novel puts forward. It is assumed that, if we could come to understand ourselves from a distance, we would redeem ourselves. The "welter of particulars" that is presented to us about a character must then be reduced "to some abstract, categorical rule or regularity" (Ermarth, *Realism* 33). "[A] certain distance . . . from particulars is introduced into all perception by the idea that the identity of things is independent of their aspects" (33).

1.3 Narrative Consequences

1.31 Consensus

Ermarth's concept of consensus is that the narrator must present before the reader a world which confirms plausibly the reality that the reader supposes to be out there. This narrator, Ermarth explains, is not usually someone the reader has access to in the present moment of narration, but instead, s/he is one who represents a consensus of views, and even a group of people. Champion of the public voice, s/he provides a reality of continuous time that is co-extensive with one the author would imagine her readers to believe in, and that confirms a sense of a "natural" order and choices. As we have seen, this narrator, sitting as s/he does beyond the confines of the immediate story, in a

future time, has the advantage of hindsight, but at the expense of being immersed (to the point of blindness to the future) in current events. Without being completely involved in any event, s/he has the ability to determine for him/herself (and for the reader) what we will let those events mean. The realistic narrator on his or her perch represents the essence of the human ability to create abstract generalizations, which we are encouraged to accept as "true" interpretations of "reality."

As the reader reads, s/he is held within the mechanism of past-tense generalization, and directed by it. We may enter the mind of a character--even, possibly the mind of the narrator at an earlier time in his/her life--we may even hear his/her torments, but we remain at the same safe distance that the narrator does. The identity of any one character in past-tense narrative must be perceived from the distance the narrator puts between her/himself and that character. If the narrator decides to seek consistencies in the character's behaviour and thinking, the reader will follow suit. In a realistic narrative, it is unlikely that the narrator will draw attention to the fact that we are simply receiving the point of view s/he has chosen, and that we are forced to follow her in her deductions. It is unlikely that the narrator will shift his/her position drastically in the course of telling the story, for example, as this would draw attention to his/her role as teller. The story will most likely be presented as an unproblematical historical account of "what happened." Ermarth puts it this way: the "estrangement from the concrete" (the fact that the narrator generally represents a larger public voice, and has little present-moment reality) "is what gives consciousness its power in realistic conventions, a power that constantly overwhelms the nice distinctions

among narrator, character, and fictional structure" (*Realism* 79). Ermarth points out that "the peculiarity of this narrative consciousness appears most clearly" in the "relation[s] between the narrator and the formal elements of the novel." In order to maintain the sense of a true picture of reality, then, realistic convention demands that "patterns of imagery, parallel episodes, paired characters, or any of the rhythmic, repetitive features whose function is to confirm the orderliness of human experience" (79), must--as narrative devices--remain as invisible as possible.

1.32 *The Narrator as Nobody*

Past-tense narration in *realistic* fiction sets up a narrator who *has no particularity* and, in fact, is "nobody." Speaking from a disembodied future time, s/he is "a survivor stripped of all the distinguishing marks of human identity except a voice . . . stripped of physical embodiment, gesture, concreteness" (*Realism* 85). Even the first-person narrator speaks with a past-even focalization, taking away from the particularity of the point of telling. The first-person narrator acts as representative or survivor in this way much as a third-person narrator would. This disembodiment, explains Ermarth, is the price of being a realistic narrator, whose perspective "reflects most fully the potential of consciousness for continuous extension of power," but at the price of "estrangement from the particulars of experience and from the actual present--the price, in a word, of disembodiment" (85). This technique is well suited to a humanist tradition which seeks to encapsulate the world and all its interactions in a human perspective and interpretive framework.

Ermarth's analysis distinguishes between two mnemonic levels in realistic fiction. While we are at times lost with Hetty and wandering, the narrator will resolve this wandering and every character will be brought to his/her expected end. The mnemonic level where the narrator brings us on a journey with a character, where that character's particular problems and interests are described, Ermarth calls the secondary mnemonic level. Because of the various interests of particular characters, another level is called upon which unifies and makes sense of the disparate claims of these individuals, and this she calls the narrative or primary mnemonic level. It is this level that brings about what makes sense, and creates a plausible reality. "The premises of realism thus foster a language of mediation that maintains tension between inside [the individual] and outside [the public voice], between surface and depth, between public and private" (*Realism* 47)."

It is in the self-conscious manipulation of the realistic conventions we have been examining that Winterson achieves her distinct and altogether unrealistic effects. We will look at Winterson's particular stylistic practices in the next two chapters. She is by no means the first to depart from realistic convention, and she not-so-meekly falls in behind Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, Joyce and Yeats as a formal innovator in her own right. Winterson flies in the face of the author/narrator distinctions made by every analyst from Wayne Booth to Michel Foucault, and she questions the invented nature of fiction--and the objective nature of "reality" itself.

Winterson's fiction is, among other things, an example of a postmodern

convergence of genres based on an attempt to (re)create the experience of interpellation of the subject in a cultural context. Rather than confirm any given means to an identification of self, it enacts the multiplicity of identifying influences and resistances that confront us, the gaps and moments between them, and the will that can manage and choose between these to varying degrees.

It might be helpful to use structural analyses to detect the moments in Winterson's fiction where those same analyses no longer hold. Most important, it seems to me, in a structural narrative analysis, is the interpretation of larger structural patterns and changes in narrative position in terms of their epistemological ramifications. Questions about what effects the use of particular structural techniques have for the reader are not generally asked. In the hope of understanding which assumptions of empirical thought are threatened by less realistic narration, I will use structuralist analysis--particularly the analytic methods of Gérard Genette, as well as those of Wayne Booth and Seymour Chatman--to watch this particular writer at work.

Genette explains that "it is almost impossible for me [meaning the author] not to locate the story in time with respect to my narrating act." He investigates the "point of narrating" and its spatial and temporal placement relative to the events of a story (its diegetic elements). We will set aside the question of distinguishing between "real life" and the "representational" for now. Genette attributes the necessity of pinpointing the "temporal determinations of the narrating instance" to the necessity of speaking in the past, present or future tense (215). Ermarth's analysis makes clear that the past tense is critical to the ideological purposes of realistic narrative. The need to create consensus

by assembling all particular views of a narrative into a semblance of reality requires past-tense narration, or what Genette calls *subsequent* narration. He observes that narration in the past tense is "by far and away the most frequent." In trying to place the temporal narrative position, Genette looks for a moment after the event by which the narrator has had a chance at least to collect his/her thoughts. In describing the circumstances of what he calls *interpolated* narrating--the position, incidentally, most often used by Winterson--Genette, explains, "here, the narrator is at one and the same time still the hero and already someone else: the events of the day are already in the past, and the 'point of view' may have been modified since then" (218).

When temporal point of narration is manipulated and changed as often and as radically as it is in a novel like *Art & Lies*, there is a sense of the disintegration of the traditional narrative consciousness. Whereas the traditional unified realistic narrator ties together the disparate views of individual characters, the constantly broken narrative voice of *Art & Lies*, for example, leaves glaring gaps in the fabric of the world presented. This allows two things to happen. First, the narrative *as* narrative becomes more evident. Because the pictured world is less unified, the process by which it is seen and communicated is thrust into view and questioned, seen, perhaps, for what it is: a story-telling with its own particular point of interpretation. This leads to the second effect: that of placing the nature of reality itself in the balance. Structuralists have traditionally concentrated on the first effect of narrative analysis, but about the second, conclusions were left up to readers' deductions. I will set out, to some degree, to show that in a text such as Winterson's, the respective roles of writer, narrator, and reader,

are radically shifted or transformed, allowing more freedom to all three of the players in textual creation. This, in turn, challenges traditional--or at least empirical--notions of the origins of reality.

The distinction in all structural analyses between narrator and writer rests on the assumption that a novel is written and then must be analyzed quite apart from that time of writing. In fact, the time of writing of the novel itself is not brought into the discussion; instead, the act of reading is emphasized. Michel Foucault describes the priorities of structural analyses this way:

It is said (and it is still a very familiar thesis) that the proper role of criticism is not to untangle the connection between the work and the author, nor to try to reconstruct a thought or an experience through the text. Rather, criticism must analyze the work in its structure, in its architecture, in its intrinsic form, and in the interaction of its internal relations. (Foucault, "What Is an Author?" 605)

Wayne Booth describes realistic practice by explaining that,

The author as he writes should be like the ideal reader described by Hume in "The Standard of Taste," who, in order to reduce the distortions produced by prejudice, considers himself as "man in general" and forgets, if possible, his "individual being" and his "peculiar circumstances." (70)

To be fair, Booth devotes several pages to a discussion of "commitment" and the writer, finally explaining that a writer must take on a *second self*, who transmits some of him/herself to the reader: "[h]owever impersonal he may try to be, his reader will inevitably construct a picture of the official scribe who writes in this manner--and of

course the official scribe will never be neutral toward all values" (71). Booth continues by analyzing "the intricate relationship of the so-called real author with his various official versions of himself" (71). He differentiates between the "narrator," whom he sees as "only one of the elements created by the implied author and who may be separated from him by large ironies" and who is "seldom if ever identical with the implied image of the artist" (73). Foucault himself distinguishes carefully between "narrator" and "writer."

It is well-known that in a novel in the first person, the signs of localization do not always refer exactly to the writer nor to the moment in which he wrote. It would be as wrong to seek the author on the side of the real writer as on the side of the fictional speaker; the function of the author is realized in the split between the two. (610)

Foucault makes this statement after discussing the function of "author" in culture and the fact that no remotely known author's name simply connotes his/her existence, but brings to mind all his/her works and any cultural references they may have. But the point he makes here is that in most novels a distinction is to be made between narrator and author and that this is "well known."

The assumption is that novels use a given narrative technique that can be depended on. These given narrative techniques strongly depend on clear and objective distinctions between self and other, between objective and subjective reality, and between the writer, the reader, and the work. By questioning these basic ontological distinctions in her fiction, Winterson complicates the traditional reading process.

When traditional roles of writer, implied writer, narrator and reader are merged, the authority on which the reality of the fictive world rests is disrupted. Not only does the reader encounter the mechanics of writing, s/he finds him/herself in the position of deciding what to believe about words and reality, art and lies.

2 *"Highly wrought, highly artificial"*

The Word calls her. The word that is spirit, the word that is breath, the word that hangs the world on its hook. The word bears her up, translates the incoherent flesh into airy syntax. The word lifts her off all fours and puts a god in her mouth. She distances up the shrunken world in a single span of her tongue. (*Art & Lies* 73)

Reading the words put together by another person brings a reader through a sequence of images that then take on a life of their own there, in the mind of that reader. Each word, sequence, and image mingles with a similar sequence, image, or word existing at the time in the reader's life and memory, creating an altogether new configuration of references through which every subsequent experience is in turn interpreted. Those inner associations and topographies then become part of the particular interweaving between self and interpellation that is the experienced life of any person. This understanding of knowledge is not separate from the being that makes us. Paul Smith describes this view of knowledge and the subject as one that

can be read as the particular intrication of knowledge, discourse, and history in the constitution of a materially and historically specific human agent. So with the attack on [deconstruction of] the "knowledgeable subject" must come the hope of an *impresumed* subject, an agent whose knowledge and discourse--and thus whose activity--are no longer cerned, no longer the separate spheres which divide "subject" from structure. (102)

The subject and structure of Winterson's fiction coalesce in an interplay of the individual (reader, character, narrator, writer) and language. The possibility of consensus, the objectivity of the fictional world, and a more familiar "structure between interpenetrating minds," as J. Hillis Miller calls it (*Form* 5), are destabilized by the manipulation of the narrator's role. The moment of perception is challenged by the fragmentation of time and therefore of space. These tamperings have the effect of altering the relationship of the reader to the fiction, of the narrator to the characters, and of the characters to each other, to the degree that the way these positions can know each other changes. In Ermarth's terms, both primary and secondary mnemonic levels are affected by the "enactment" of these new ways of being. The way form is manipulated in these fictions presents us with new possibilities for ways of knowing and being in the world.

In chapter 1 we looked at Ermarth's analysis of realistic conventions in the novel. Chapters 2 and 3 look at Winterson's departures from the requirements of realistic narrative, examining particular stylistic innovations in closer detail so as to investigate both how she achieves the changes and what effect they have on reading and understanding the world of her fiction. Structured on Ermarth's requirements of past tense narration ("continuous time," "futurity," "coordinating systems," and "identity"), these next two chapters concentrate on some of Winterson's characters and their realities as well as the effects of her narrative technique.

2.1 Temporal Continuity

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.

(T.S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton" 1-5)

In her *Sequel to History: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time*, Ermarth explains that "while all narrative is temporal by definition because its medium is temporal, postmodern sequences make accessible new temporal capacities that subvert the privilege of historical time and bind temporality in language" (11). In most of Winterson's fiction, linear time is treated as a construct rather than as objective truth. Though Winterson's fictions tend to begin and end with events in which many characters are involved, each character's experience of the passage of time varies to such a degree that centuries pass for some, while only days pass for others. And this fact is celebrated, not remedied. In *Art & Lies*, Sappho lives in 600 B.C. and in 2000 A.D., and moves freely from one century to another; Jordan can be our contemporary, or Tradescant's, in *Saving the Cherry*. Each experience of time is given such value and authority that any abstract idea of a universal continuity, or general sense of "history" pales in comparison.

Because of the importance given to particular narrative voices in *Art & Lies* and

in *Sexing the Cherry*, one can never quite grasp what the "real" distance is between events, and one is not encouraged to do so. One begins to set up three or four or more time-lines, and even then there are great gaps and confusion as to what happened before or after what. The voice of each narrator indicates the beginning of a new world; each character/narrator's language has a resonance and rhythm of its own. There are, drawn out in intermittent paragraphs of Winterson's fiction, traceable time-lines; however, they are not critical to understanding her fiction. In a 1990 preface to *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, Winterson protests:

I really don't 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, every turning yields another turning, not symmetrical, not obvious. Not chaos either. A sophisticated mathematical equation made harder to unravel because X and Y have different values on different days. (xiii)

It is not that Winterson never acknowledges an abstract historical time, but she is too busy juggling her escapes from it to be closely tied to it. She does without many of the usual narrative rallying devices ("meanwhile" interjections, and universal temporal references). At times, events in her fiction are attached only to chapters or headings. The reader is left to place the events in whatever formal or historical structure s/he wishes, or to allow the accounts to merge--as they do in memory--in haphazard order. Winterson's fictions take on some of the qualities Ermarth uses to describe *Paradise Lost*, in which "discontinuities in the medium distort the patterns and rhythms of ordinary perception and force readers to attend to the system as a whole and to . . . its

architecture" (62). And in the same way as consensus in *Paradise Lost* is to be distrusted as a devious device of Satan's--and history to be seen as an "arena of confusion," not an "orderly linear sequence" (61)--"history" is broken and a more visionary voice is the result. Milton's endings are religious revelations; one might say Winterson's are too.

One effect of this valorization of individuals' experiences of time, and the consequent breakdown of an abstract time-line, is that no individual is seen to interpret the convention of time "correctly," or in the way that another person does. In his *Discerning the Subject*, Paul Smith discusses the need to

construct some notion of the *place* of the living person in the processes of the social in such a way as to avoid seeing him/her as *entire*--either in the sense of being entirely submitted to the domination of the ideological . . . [for the purposes of *my* discussion, entirely "determined and directed by clock-time"] . . . or of being entirely capable of choosing his/her place in the social by dint of possessing full consciousness or some such version of what can be called sovereign subjectivity. In either case . . . the product is an abstract version of the "subject." (24)

What Smith proposes as a model for understanding individual will or ability to determine him/herself "is that resistance is best understood as a specific twist in the dialectic between individuation and ideological interpellation" (25). And it is precisely this kind of picture of resistance that characterizes the movement through time of Winterson's characters. Determined by choices made early in his life, Handel (of *Art & Lies*) struggles with the perception of his own indoctrination by the church and

convention, and his drive finally to free himself. He nevertheless appreciates the relationships and connections with art and the symbolic world (exemplified in opera and "the book") that have been his. By the end of *Art & Lies*, he has achieved a greater degree of awareness, and therefore, of freedom. Sappho has found that her resistance to objective time allows her to travel in it. Jordan (of *Sexing the Cherry*) finds his way out of clock time as well. Experience, memory, and interpretation become mingled in a sea which recalls T.S. Eliot's "The Dry Salvages," where the meaning of experiences can be missed and memory can thrust us suddenly up against its meaning like never before (90-114), making *it* more "real" than any previous round.

2.11 *The Secret Selves*

Once the "reality" of an inner self is established, more possibilities emerge for an inner world and its differences from the outer one. In all three of the fictions we are looking at, the characters question objective and continuous time, in an attempt to come to a point where inner time is truly valued.

In *Sexing the Cherry*, the pollution activist's experience differs from what her calendar and watch tell her. She decides "to abandon the common-sense approach and accept what is actually happening to [her]; that time has slowed down" (126). It is her decision to accept the known experience over any standard, and to value "subjective" knowledge, which sets her apart from others, like, for example, the "Jack" characters (from both *Art & Lies* and *Sexing the Cherry*). In *Sexing the Cherry*, Jack admonishes Nicolas-Jordan: "[T]he trouble with you, Nicolas, is that you never think about your

future, you just live day to day" (136). Given Nicolas-Jordan's ability to travel in time, this is the reprimand of an android to a poet. In *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, Jeanette befriends Elsie Norris who understands, "the great effect of the imagination on the world" (29-30), and encourages the girl's unusual spirit. Elsie trusts in the power of human belief: "[I]f you think about something for long enough . . . more than likely, that thing will happen . . . It's all in the head" (30). The chemist/activist in *Sexing the Cherry* confesses to having travelled time to the 17th century where she became the Dog-Woman. It is her ability to listen to all possible forms, all possible worlds--including her innermost convictions--that allows her to slide between the centuries. She concludes: "I don't know if other worlds exist in space or time. Perhaps this is the only one and the rest is rich imaginings. Either way it doesn't matter. We have to protect both possibilities. They seem to be interdependent" (128). This valorizing of the inner self already destabilizes traditional notions of the limits of self and of reality.

These characters' "innermost convictions" are not trapped inside them; instead, within them lies access--as through the back of a wardrobe--to an inner or spiritual world inhabited by others as well. Jordan articulates some of the mechanics of these experiences in his short lecture on "The Nature of Time" (89-92):

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 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. (90)

The characters that populate Jordan's and Sappho's travels are both real and imaginary. Jordan calls Fortunata "a woman who does not exist" (130). We do not know if he is acknowledging that his image of her is not who she "really" is, or if he imagined her entirely: she is part of himself. But then, in a world where your mother comes in a cobalt blue bottle with a wax stopper, who's worrying? (79) "Atthis, Andromeda, Gyrinno, Eranna, Mnasiidika" are Sappho's "studies of the imagination." And yet she remembers, "Some I loved, some I dreamed of loving . . . They were not my own. Not one flesh but one image and the image more potent than the flesh" (56-57). For the characters who travel in time, reality and the imagination are so closely allied, and so transformed in their alliance, some notion of an external "real" is not conceivable. The people encountered on such adventures range from the allegorical to the "shaping spirit for the lover's dreams" (*Saving* 74), to "empty space and points of light" (*Saving* 144; *Art & Lies* 30, 122), but they are poignant and clear "objects" of desire and yearning. The observer simply acknowledges their own part in their creation . . . "if the body is personal, the mind is transpersonal . . . its range is not limited by identity" (*Art & Lies* 62). The merging of self and other in these new ways again questions both the self-determinism and solitariness of the individual. Winterson's work again pushes the reader into a deconstruction and reconstruction of ideas of subjectivity.

There is always a balance of freedom and captivity, between the "inner" and the "outer" life in Winterson's fiction. While "actual life" is bound, the "spirit" is free. To be caught in time, is to be

caught in a continuous present . . . to look at a map and not see the hills, shapes and undulations, but only the flat form. There is no sense of dimension, only a feeling for the surface. Thinking about time is more dizzy and precipitous.

(Sexing the Cherry 89)

To make a form live is to add an inner sense of time to the outer one. If we simply remain contained in clock-time, we become Time's "bondsman" (142). Doll--that caricature and Hogarth-esque character who has her own connection to Sappho⁷--suffers under time's sickle.

Her breasts, her thighs, were stippled with time. From her nose down to the corners of her mouth, were two river-bed creases where time flowed in obedience to gravity, a gravity Doll Sneerpiece denied by smiling at Newton in the street.
(59)

The activist claims that time "is no longer measured in the units I am used to but has mutinied and run wild. I do not measure time now, time measures me. This is frightening" (126). Jordan admits that "we do not move through time, time moves through us. I say this because our physical bodies have a natural decay span, they are one-use only units that crumble around us" (90). He explains his two lives as follows:

A man or woman sunk in dreams that cannot be spoken, about a life they do not possess, comes suddenly to a door in the wall. They open it. Beyond the door is that life and a man or a woman to whom it is already natural. It may not be possessions they want, it may well be the lack of them, but the secret life is suddenly revealed. (74)

So a number of us are set with a weight that keeps our view of things well attached to the rack of time. But though western culture now tries to deny the inner life, "the most prosaic of us betray a belief in the inward life every time we talk about 'my body' rather than 'I'. . . . Language always betrays us, tells the truth when we want to lie" (*Saving* 90). Again, Jordan upholds an opposition of the inner life and the body. Sappho speaks of Picasso in the same "betraying" terms after Picasso has survived her suicide attempt: "what matters is her life. Her life, that was more to her than flesh and blood . . . She had a spirit and it lived" (134). It lived thanks to the "miracle of the soft snow that broke her fall. Miracle of the cold snow that staunched the blood. The disinterested weather and my fervent hands. An accident of the season and a passer-by." Though it seems Sappho resuscitates Picasso--"It was her heart I pounded with both hands, my knees across her" (134)--it is nevertheless to Picasso's spirit that Sappho attributes the young woman's survival. Sappho affirms that there is "no doubt of the difference between actual life and the real solid world of images" (146).

This Platonic cosmos, complete with transcendent modalities, *also* resembles a holographic world where parts embody entireties. However, this is not a world that could ever be contained or entirely grasped within a single human consciousness. The complexity of Sappho's or Jordan and Fortunata's world is itself infinite, and every view is complicated again by individual perception. As we have seen, Winterson likens it to a "sophisticated mathematical equation made harder to unravel because X and Y have different values on different days" (*Oranges* xiii). In *Saving the Cherry*, Jordan speculates on the nature of the world . . . "it may be that this world and the moon and stars are

also a matter of the mind, though a mind of vaster scope than ours" (100). Yet Sappho finds in art the proof that the "*espaces infinis*" exist as much within each of us as without and that they can be discovered with the aid of inventiveness (*Art & Lies* 137-38).

The world of synchronicities and time travel *is* the real world in these fictions. Synchronic events are not necessarily caused by an innately linked organic cosmos, but by coils of consciousness and the power of something like a holographic image. This "real solid world of images"--"not present, actual, superficial life" (*Art & Lies* 143)--is the world of an expanded consciousness. Though Winterson does not seem to lay claim to an organic cosmos and ontology, this expanded consciousness allows thought and awareness to provide links across physical and temporal barriers usually considered insurmountable. That these barriers are surmountable does not mean the world is a complicated mathematical equation and nothing else (one a sophisticated computer might unravel, for example). The element of infinity is not included in such a model.

The image of Fortunata spinning her students, running from one to the other, maintaining their frequency (*Sexing* 72), is one of someone concentrating on the possibility of freedom from any conquering idea of ineptitude or limitation: of any logocentricity. Fortunata herself does not age, and declares, "through the body, the body is conquered" (72). It is clear that Fortunata's talents allow her to live a miraculous life, and her school to become a training ground for an expanded physical or holistic consciousness. The images of tightrope walking and flying associated with Fortunata in *Sexing the Cherry* also connote this expanded and delicately balanced life. Simply to open into an infinite world, unfettered by empirical science's assumptions of

limitation is the rule of Fortunata's life. Many of Winterson's characters take on the hope of achieving this kind of freedom and mystic connection to the world.

Sappho's secret self finds its own way around Time. While she has had her own experience with Time's courtship (60, 141-143), she now avoids him by her words: "[T]he word traps time before Time traps me" (138). While, "time turns [her] under the sun". . . she "can turn the sun through time." Of her travels: "here, there, nowhere . . . Mitylene 600 BC, the city 2000 After Death" (67) . . . She "invents what [she] practice[s]" (69), "resist[s] Time's pull", declaring, "the body ages, dies, but the mind is free" (62). She takes the lines Time has written on her body:

. . . raided my own body and made my poem out of his. Split Time's metre and snapped his smooth rhythms. I have learned his forms and mastered them and so become mistress of what is my own. I am a warrior and this is the epic of my resistance. (64)

When Picasso manages to leave her torturous family, she finds a bridge: "[I]t was the colour that made a bridge for her, not out of time, but through it" (135).

The inner self, the outer self, time now only what one believes it to be, the self merging and disengaging with others: this is the world Winterson presents us with. We have left any attempt to hold to continuous time well behind and enter a world of possibility we are unaccustomed to.

2.12 Narrative Voice: Time as Construct

Art & Lies begins with a third-person voice in the present tense, and quickly changes to

first person, past tense in the next section. Three paragraphs later, a new narrator, in the third person and past tense, tells a story set in 300 B.C. Alexandria, in the middle of which s/he breaks into classical Latin for a paragraph. Next comes the story of a near-cult-type 17th-century (?) character called Doll Sneerpiece, told somewhat stiltedly by a third-person narrator in the past tense. A narrative rant against modern medicine ensues, after which the first-person-past-tense narration from the beginning takes up again, in an account of Handel's days in seminary. Realistic narrative technique is not altogether destroyed, but in the first few pages of *Art & Lies* several narrative voices are used, from the typological/allegorical Doll Sneerpiece to Handel's opinionated musings. This change of narrators and temporal positions of narrating preclude any establishment of a linear time-line. Each "story" does not go on long enough for any sense of consensus to solidify, or for a narrator to establish any tone of authority. We are left with a sense of the gaps between narrative sections, and little clue as to why we are being led this way. Through these gaps, as it were, the structure makes itself obvious. Just as the world is fragmented and yet alive with the possibility of profound connection, this fragmented narrative contains the possibility of metaphorical connection on many levels.

After the first two paragraphs of *Art & Lies*, the narrative starts again with a new temporal narrative position, spoken in the first person and in the past tense. In it, someone--we do not yet know who, or where, or when--examines a book as though it were his/her first time looking at it: "I was not the first one to find the book." We are not sure if this is the man from the first two paragraphs, or if it is someone else in a

different time and place altogether. The book is opened, and s/he describes the things in it very closely, but as a person who does not recognize their personal significance: ". . . an ugly man . . . a beautiful woman . . . a feather . . . a rose" . . . an ancient book full of memorabilia, an unopened letter, hand-drawings, maps, scribblings. The book itself, however, s/he calls "the" book. S/he *has* seen it before, or knows something about its past. But the past of the book is foreign, and unremembered.

The second and third paragraphs in the section describe the book's physical properties, what the paper is like and its colour; "not all the pages had been cut. In spite of this past, this book had not been finished, but unfinished by whom? The reader or the writer?" We are left with this question as the description of the book's cover continues in the third paragraph. While an uncut book does connote one that hasn't been read, uncut pages have little to do with whether the writer hadn't finished writing the book, so long as it is not a hand-copied book. An unexpected question. The layers of printing and incidental notes in the book mirror the multiple consciousnesses that we will see Handel become, but this metaphor is certainly not available to the reader at this point. The only information we have about the book's contents is the personal things the reader left in it, including drawings. The narrator hints that the feather in the book could be a bookmark (an object that reminds us of the progress of a reader, reading through printed pages), or the book could be used as a feather-store (a precious feather belonging to a reader and having nothing to do with what the book is "about"). The usual emphasis on the writer and the content of a book is absent, and instead, we know all kinds of other information about it. This book might be a diary, but this is not

specified. The narrator may be alluding to the difference between reader and writer: the reader writes while reading, and the writer reads while writing. This is another enigmatic question which suggests that an answer will be made clear as we read on, perhaps by the very process of reading. This enigmatic question confirms that there is something extraordinary in this narrative voice, something that moves outside the realm of realistic narration, and involves deeper epistemological speculation. (Not insignificant is the fact that the reader is reading a book, and reading about a book at the same time.) The book described takes on a mystical quality. Each of the mementoes described in the first paragraph has an unexplained meaning. This book will reappear several times in *Art & Lies*; the rose is picked and placed in the book; the unopened letter is opened and read. This is our first encounter with the book, and even here it takes on a mysterious status. Calvino describes the significance an object can take on in writing:

The moment an object appears in a narrative, it is charged with a special force and becomes like the pole of a magnetic field, a knot in the network of invisible relationships. The symbolism of an object may be more or less explicit, but it is always there. We might even say that in a narrative any object is always magic.

(33)

In the third paragraph the book is closed; its exterior is described. We are finally given some sense of temporal placement. It is winter and the sun is setting; we are now in a specific time and place. The setting sun may be the light we saw in the first two

paragraphs of the book; it may not be. By the fourth paragraph the narrator is opening the book, it seems, again for the first time: "I untied the waxy string and the book fell over my hands . . ." The first paragraph gave us a description of the book's contents *before* the book was opened. At any rate, its events seem to have occurred after the third and fourth paragraphs. Was it that the narrator had opened the book several times before, but had never experienced it quite like this? No explanation. However, the fourth paragraph also confirms that the narrator is likely the man on the train whom we met in the first section--"a dirty traveller on a dirty tired train."

He has an extraordinary experience of light, as did the man in the first section. His heart leaps at the flood of light that falls from the book. The light is heavy and saturates his palms and spills down on to his trouser legs. Within this man, however, two voices begin a small battle. He is astounded at the light, but wants to call it "a trick, of course, a fluke of the weak sun". Later he wants to believe the book is warm because it had "lain in the sun." But, obviously, he doubts the miraculous thing that is happening to him. The light makes him feel like "an apostle . . . a saint." The "moving pool" mentioned is a reference to a biblical miracle.⁸ Some healing property makes the narrator's heart leap. Finally he laughs, "a few lines of physics had been turned into a miracle"; he has written off the experience as simply the physics of sunlight. But another voice quickly corrects the scientific one: "Or: A miracle has been turned into a few lines of physics?"

There is an interesting change of tense in these two statements. " . . . a few lines of physics had been turned into a miracle. Or: A miracle has been turned into a few

lines of physics?" In the first statement, he refers to his own "subjective" experience, to what he "had" just done. In the second, he wonders if all miracles have been reduced to a few lines of physics. A miraculous experience, or a fluke of the weak sun? He questions the basic nature of extraordinary experiences. If he simply told the story of the light as a miracle, it would be read as a fantasy, the story of a dream. However, the narrator suggests by the last question in the paragraph that reality might be more than we now think it is. The question becomes not "is this a dream or is it reality?" but "could I extend the definition of what is real?" If we are unwilling to question the parameters of "reality," we might think the narrator was exaggerating just a bit, and turning a few lines of physics into a miracle. However, this narrator himself pushes us to question those "few lines," asking whether our culture has turned all miraculous experiences into a human explanation in a textbook. By using the imperfect, the words "a miracle" in the second statement come to mean all miracles.

This section (pages 3 and 4) uses the past tense and brings into play all the requirements of past-tense narration we looked at in Chapter 1. The focalization is on the book, but the narrative voice speaks to us from a future time by which mysteries have perhaps been revealed and resolved. We begin to believe that the unconnected scraps described will be connected together in an event that makes some sort of sense in the usual objective scheme of things, and that their identity and significance will be revealed. A small problem with these assumptions occurs when the temporal point of subsequent narration seems to change in the section. The book is open at the beginning of the section, closed part-way through the section, and then dramatically opened as if

for the first time at the end of it. The second opening is a revelatory experience, while the first is narrated by someone who takes a curious but relatively unemotional view of the matter. In the first account, we hear the voice, as it were, of an investigator, and we are looking at "the" book: definite article, but the object is still unfamiliar. Is this the same narrator we find in the last two paragraphs of the section, who has by then changed his/her perception of reality? It is possible to read the first two paragraphs as if told from a different temporal point than that from which the second two are told. Rather than the opening few paragraphs relating an event prior to the second, the first seems to relate something that happened *after* the event described in the last two. There is no mention of the train until the last paragraph, so there is no reason to assume that what is described in the first two paragraphs of the section does not happen in a different place with a different narrator than that which is described in the last two paragraphs. On the other hand, the two "discoveries" of the book might well be the same one, with the first being that of simple sight, the second that of a visionary consciousness. In the course of this confusion, the framework of past-tense narration is radically disturbed. Whether we have changed moods, points of narration, or narrators is unclear.

Though the past tense persists in this second section of *Art & Lies*, it is unclear where, or how far in the future, it speaks from, or whether two different people open the book, or whether one person goes through a radical change in perspective in an interval of indeterminate length that takes place between the two openings of the book. The identity of the narrator fragments. While it seems most likely that the first section of

Art & Lies relates the same event the second one does, that same event itself begins to look multi-faceted. At the end of both sections, a man looks at a plate of glass. The first section is told in the present tense, and any sense of past and future fall away by the end of the section. In the second section, we are aware of a future time from which the story is told, and toward which it may lead, but this time the integrity of the narrator begins to fragment when we recognize a change in tone, and a non-linear sequence (the book is open, and then the book is opened).

The narrators of the first and second sections of this chapter present the miraculous as the ordinary, the ordinary as containing the miraculous. Much as García Márquez does in his story "The Man with Enormous Wings", Winterson presents an enactment that questions our usual parameters of experience. Is the story of glorious light in the first few pages of the book a "distortion" of what "really" happened? A lie? Is it "a faithful account of men and things" (Eliot, *Bede* 221)? Instead, together with the fabulists and surrealists before her, Winterson in her narrative poses questions that loosen the connections between representation and experience. In the context of this loosening, the nature of "reality," as we define it, is questioned. Not only can art encompass more, "art" and "reality" (what Winterson calls "lies") come closer together.

Though we are reading a chapter entitled "Handel," it is not clear yet who he (or she) might be. In fact we don't read the name for another six pages. The various narrators who begin *Art & Lies* are creating the patches for a blanket whose size and shape are indeterminate and which is spread over time in such a way that only the writer's hand can possibly draw them together. The possibilities for realistic consensus

narrow as the patches accumulate. Now the story launches into an account of the Alexandrian library. This whole next section is iterative in that it explains how things were habitually done. We hear of various stages in the development of a retrieval system using boys who climbed the stacks of the library, of problems and how they were surmounted. But the more one reads, the more fantastic the whole scene becomes (never mind the fact that the library at Alexandria contained scrolls and tablets, not "volumes" as such). Again, rather than the content of the books being described, we hear of the human lives surrounding the books. As the "miles" of shelves, and the "eyries" the climbing boys build are described, the report takes on a fantastic tone. These boys could "die of hunger" while searching for a book for over a week, though later we learn that they build small apartments of the books, and eat their dinners off them. How food was transported to them or how they disposed of their garbage is not important; instead, "beds were books and chairs were books and dinner was eaten off books and all the stuffings, linings, sealings, floorings, openings and closings, were books" (6). Nevertheless, the narrator summons an historical authority to authenticate the report. Though this report is of "a contemporary of Pliny the Younger," none of the classical sources mention existing writing by any contemporary of Pliny the Younger that describes the library. The Latin in the section by this authority is not of Pliny's period, but of a later one.⁹

The tone of "authority" taken on by the narrative voice in this section is a tongue-in-cheek take on academic writing or lecturing, complete with Latin quote. One speculative sentence weighs down the humour (or is lifted up by the humour): "There is

no system that has not another system concealed within it." Immediately reminiscent of "Every journey conceals another journey within its lines" from *Saving the Cherry* (9), this line throws us out of the descriptive play of the narrative voice, and presents the whole scene that has been described as a metaphor. This speculative line is the only sentence of the entire section that is expressed in the present tense, as an aphorism, and it connotes something to be learned from the design of the boys' rookeries. The relationship of this iterative story to the previous two sections is only thematic. Books are featured in each, but in quite different ways. The opening two sections mix the extraordinary with a contemporary scene on a commuter train; this last one, told from, we suppose, a timeless university setting, brings "every use to which a book can be put so long as it is never read" into the scene again: a book as a feather store or a bed.

The next section takes up this theme immediately; Doll Sneerpiece declares her unorthodox use of book pages. We are introduced to the caricature/character and her Patriot-like friend, Miss Mangle. The section is told in the past tense, and mostly contains the Doll's first-person musings about Ruggiero. Ruggiero is a scholar, and the Doll dreamily characterizes him as a book: she would like to "run her fingers down his margins, and to decipher his smooth spine. . . ." Doll sees him passing by her window, calls out, and virtually throws herself to him, crying out, "Ruggiero!."

A new narrator "shut[s] the book against her cry." Could this book be the one we saw at the start, or is it the academic book with the Latin quote? We find out later that the book is most likely *The Entire and Honest Recollections of a Bawd*. But when we read this paragraph for the first time, there is no way of knowing this. While Doll

throws herself outward, hollering, this new narrator is self-contained, preferring to "hold [his/her] desires just out of reach of appetite." This short section is told in the present tense (except for the first two sentences) and presumably represents the narrator musings after s/he closes the book about Doll Sneerpiece. Mostly a small introductory monologue, the passage is to a great degree iterative, describing the narrator's preferences, opinions, and habits. The change of narrator to the voice of a reader had the disconcerting effect for this reader of feeling my own reading-space suddenly invaded. We are displaced from a fable-like story into a pudish conscience passing judgment on Doll for her "brute" but "fashionable" appetite. The act of reading and its extrapolations and reveries are brought to mind. The reader in *Art & Lies* comes to view as another character on another level of the narrative.

From the third to the fifth sections we move from a pseudo-scholarly section, through a narrative, and into the mind of a reader, whose inner voice answers Doll's cry. We can assume that the reader's voice continues after his/her objection to Doll's book. In a clear-minded gripe first against doll, and then against modern medicine, automobiles, television, and DNA research, materialism, and money-mindedness in general, a more obviously contemporary voice cynically criticizes science's inability to cure unhappiness, ending with a small iterative scene in the present tense:

"Take this," says the Doctor, "you'll soon feel better." They do feel better, because, little by little, they cease to feel at all. (8)

Finally, we return to a past-tense narration in the first person: a man telling of his days as a young medical student at a seminary. He comments that, "as faith in God has

declined, belief in science, especially medical science, has increased." We recognize the voice from the preceding section, and integrate the gripe against materialism with this section. But the voice tells stories that gradually move closer and closer to his temporal point of narration, until he explains in the present tense, "we don't do it anymore," referring to radical mastectomies. The character that becomes visible continues his flashbacks and commentaries. The cynical voice, rebelling against the "rubbers" of both the operating theatre and the brothel, we now know, is the voice of Handel. He is the one who tells us the stories of his years as an oncologist in the next long section (to page 11).

2.13 *The Implied Writer*

Behind the voices of this first chapter of *Art & Lies* sits "the principle that invented the narrator, along with everything else in the narrative, that stacked the cards in this particular way, had these things happen to these characters, in these words or images" (Chatman, *Story* 148). Chatman's designation for this principle is "the implied writer". Obviously, any assumptions we make about the writer are mere conjecture for the sake of understanding the text, or at least that is the convention. As Winterson herself has said,

How each artist learns to translate autobiography into art is a problem that each artist solves for themselves [sic]. When solved, unpicking it impossible, we cannot work backwards from the finished text into its raw material. The commonest mistake of critics and biographers is to assume that what holds

significance for them necessarily held significance for the writer. (*Art Objects* 106)

However, with a text like Winterson's, the writer's hand is apparent in quite a different way than it is in the realistic novelist's. In modern and postmodern fiction, the invented world is one that pulls at all our usual identifying points of reference, challenging our sense of being in our own world, rather than reinforcing the order we feel inclined to believe in. George Eliot's polemic reinforces "virtue" while hiding in an ostensibly real coating. Her voice stands in its armour of realistic clarity, playing the role of "implied author." By breaking consensus, and a sense of continuous time in the fictional arena, and by introducing several different narrative moods and voices, the artifice of Winterson's work makes little effort to cloak itself.

Winterson calls Virginia Woolf's language "highly wrought, highly artificial and resolutely outside the mimicry of Realism" (*Art Objects* 72). Sappho's voice in *Art & Lies* asks why we pretend that language is natural, and declares that there is "nothing natural in it" (138). Handel cries,

I know that I am false; the irony is that the barkers and jabberers believe themselves genuine. . . . As if, as journalists and novelists would have me believe, to write without artifice is to write honestly. But language *is* artifice. The human being is artificial. . . . Better then to acknowledge that what we are is what we have been taught, that done, at least it will be possible to choose our own teacher. (184)

So we find in each writer's original artifice--realistic or not--their particular style,

preferences and tastes. Without the realistic convention of consensus and continuous time, Winterson shows us the writer's hand in all its artificial glory pointing out the constructed quality of reality, and the variety of ways in which constructions can be welded together according to personal choice. In this way, new fiction opens the mind and even the structure of knowledge to new possibilities.

2.2 *Whose Future?*

I suggested in Chapter 1 that a realistic novel must borrow from the credibility of the reader's life to make its case as a "true" story, and that one of the ways of doing this was to suppose that the narrator's world, past and present, was one connected in time to the reader's life. In less realistic texts, though the invented world may borrow from the reader's reality in certain sections or with certain narrators (those which use more traditional subsequent narration), the practice is by no means uniform throughout the fiction. What creeps in is the implied writer's hand, switching narrators and making radical shifts in temporal point of narration. Winterson's narrators legitimize their "fictional" realities, not only by extending them to the reader's world, but also by giving the inner world of the character room to expand infinitely. The reader, in order to read the book at all, must enter the fictional world ready to experience again what might be painfully close to his/her own experiences, not only in their content (A did X to L), but the narrative form may invoke the more confusing *interpretive* moments of his/her life: may provoke, recall, and enthusiastically embrace the state of epistemological questioning that realistic fiction generally avoids. The reader of modern and post-

modern fiction also must be ready to experience knowledge in a new way: one that legitimizes the spiritual life and imagination fully and without question. In the process of reading, the reader learns to lay aside assumptions about the "reality" of his/her life, and that of fictional characters that spring from his/her own and authors' minds.

It is not necessary that a writer create a sense of futurity through a projection of narrative or diegetic reality beyond the confines of the events narrated. In partnership with the writer, the reader can legitimize (upgrade) the fictional world, and therefore any imagined and inner world, to the point that it is as "real" as the "objective" reality around her. The partnership occurs because the reading experience is not one whereby we are cajoled into believing that the fictional world is as real as ours, but rather, we are expected to question the "reality" of *our* lived, "objective" experience, and to legitimize interior and imagined experience--the fictional one, yes--but also that of our own making, in or out of the reading experience. In this way, both the reader and the writer are at work on the same sort of project. Not requiring that her fictional world "live up" to the reader's "real" life, Winterson (among others) first legitimizes the inner mind, and secondly, breaks down the barriers between what is subjective and what is objective reality, between her fiction and our reality, or between her reality and our fiction.

One of the ways Winterson achieves this effect is by looking concentratedly at one character's memory and finding many versions of a story; she asserts that the memory of one event--even the experience of it--can change over time. In the case of Picasso's memory of her suicide attempt in *Art & Lies*, it is not clear if she has many different versions of one event in her head, or if she attempted suicide many times, and

it is not important that the matter be cleared up one way or another. The fact that the text is content to let that ambiguity exist without resolution lends credibility to Picasso's inner experience, in which ambiguity defines her constant awareness of the painful memory. It would be the *realistic* narrator's job to report on the characters' experiences from an "objective" point of view, and to "correct" their "misinterpretations" of what *really* happened: when all is done, if not said, the realistic narrator gives us the "definitive" version. So, for example, a realistic narrator would try to say that, regardless of Picasso's memory of her father pushing her off the parapet, "we all know now, in the wisdom of future time," that Picasso *fell* off, and that her father was not there. This would be a report—with its obvious political interests—that concluded the matter. But Winterson chose not to supply us with this report, leaving the "true" narration up to Picasso herself.

There is no consensus, then, on what Picasso "really" did that winter night (those winter nights?). There is no George Eliot-like narrator standing "in the witness-box narrating [her] experience on oath" (*Bede* 221). No consensus means no single future time from which that event and all other events of the book are viewed from one perspective, certainly a different sort of projection toward a future time. If you like, a kind of cubism or abstraction is created that reflects our many different views of events. *Art & Lies* is, however, driven forward. There is no sense of stasis; if anything, Winterson's novels seem propelled.

Of the three fictions I have chosen to look at, *Written on the Body* is perhaps the most temporally linear in its narration. This book has only one narrator, whose

temporal change of position is comparatively infrequent. The diegetic plot-line goes something like this: Louise and our gender-nonspecific narrator (let's call him/her "Nara") begin their loving in April or May of the first year; Nara's lover Jacqueline moves out on May 12th; and Louise leaves her husband Elgin in August of that year and moves in with Nara. Nara leaves Louise on Christmas Day, hoping her oncologist husband Elgin will help bring Louise's leukemia into remission. There is a poetic interval, reflecting Nara's emotions and memories of Louise, after which it is March of the second year. Nara spends April, May, June, and July in godforsaken Yorkshire translating Russian, poring over oncology texts, and working with his/her grief. In May of that second year, Louise leaves London. Nara goes to London to find Louise in August of the narrative's second year, leaves a note in his/her apartment after six weeks of futile search, and returns to Yorkshire at the beginning of October. Louise finds the note shortly after it is left, and rushes to Yorkshire, getting there before Nara. The order of narration begins with reminiscences of August of the previous year, regresses to June, and then goes back further to April and May. It then proceeds to tell in a new way the story of August of the first year, skips to Christmas, and moves chronologically forward from there. Other than some gaps in the story (July, and September to December of year one; January to March and April to August of year two), the narration is more or less chronological.

The plot, or sequence of events in the story, however, has little to do with what this book is about. Winterson is a "writer who does not use plot as an engine or a foundation" (*Art Objects* 189) and she is impatient with plot-dependent readers (83-84)

Instead, the multiple trajectories of memory and experience throw too complex a pattern for the hard-driven single-lined plot. The character from *Written on the Body* struggles with memory in the course of his/her and Louise's love. S/he is caught in a world of symbols where s/he can only see what happens, "in relation to his[/her] own story of the world" (*Art Objects* 143). Like the Realist Winterson describes in *Art Objects*, the narrator is caught up in "romance and courtship and whirlwind" (*Written* 53)--in an *idea* of love--and can't get at his/her own experience. Multiple radio waves of memory interfere with reception and transmission between the two lovers. In the course of hearing the story from the narrator's view, we hear the stories of no less than eleven other lovers. In Genettean terms these small stories are extradiegetic; they predate the story of our narrator and Louise. In a world where objective time sits like a judge, this Nara character has "been around". In the narrator's terms, these experiences have contributed to the interference that makes it impossible for him/her to know how to live, how to feel and respond to his/her own needs and emotion. In the course of his/her grief, s/he learns that a profound love *is* worth dying for, and that individuals must make that choice for themselves. No heroics can make that choice for Louise, and no one can make the narrator see him/herself more clearly before his/her time.

The flashbacks are a formal expression of the interpretation of new experiences. As the narrator tries to understand what is happening to him/her, s/he must draw on matching sequences, images or words existing at that time in the his/her life and memory. The storyteller starts his/her tale in autumn, telling us the harvest is dry and poor; and s/he remembers another September harvest that was bursting with life. We

know then, that we are working from a subsequent moment of narration, in Genette's terms. The next sections are about that other autumn, perhaps a year before, perhaps many years before, we don't yet know. The narrator recalls the moment when Louise told her/him that she had decided to leave her husband and live with the narrator. The narrator laughs at the fun they had pretending to be married, with weeds as flowers and a stray cat as best man (19). S/he then breaks into the first of many remembrances of an event even further back in time, with a previous lover (19-20). The short interlude is one of those small and sometimes silly tangents memory takes without our wanting it to. But with this narrator, so enmeshed with clichés as s/he is, the memory is like a distraction, and is oddly fitting. And as if to yank his/her attention forward in time, and to the sacredness of that first August with Louise, the narration breaks into future tense. But from where? The bed, and the poetic description of maps, navigation, and love-making are told with the hopeful voice of that day in August. So we have the temporal point of narration in August of year two, harking back to a point of narration in August of year one, from a hotel room in Brighton? Oxford? But suddenly the narrator, rather than floating further back than Louise does, is now so deep in his/her memory of that past August in a rented room (see 17) that even the temporal point of narration has regressed to the wishful-perhaps fearful-days when their love was first acknowledged. The poignancy of this particular poetic section is partially due to this shift in the temporal point of narration, directed from the sad time in the dry August of the second year of our story, recalling the hope the lovers had that there might be "infinite pleasure and time without end" (18), remembering the hope of infinity from a moment after the

end, when the narrator is bereaved. We still don't know what tragic events intervened, but we are aware that, from the initial point of narration in the dry August, these wishes did not come true.

So, we have a subsequent narration (the main story), which hops back into a story prior to the main story (the extradiegetic story); the temporal point of narration is then literally thrown back into the days of the main story to look forward to a future that didn't happen. The second leap is more remarkable than the first, but both are narrative time-shifts that parallel the work being done in the mind of the fictional character. I counted eight other places in the novel (other than the central poetic section called "The Cells, Tissues, Systems and Cavities of the Body") where the narration slips into present-tense narration (80, 107, 154, 156, 161, 179, 183, 190) and, as I have said, there are reminiscences of a dozen former lovers (12, 16, 19, 21, 24, 41, 44, 58, 71, 75, 77, 92, 152). Far and away most of the memories of past lovers occur during dense narrations of times with Louise. The memories were (during the narrator's time with Louise) and are (in his/her hovel in Yorkshire) a way of interpreting and understanding events. They are also "barbs" (53) that prevent the lovers from feeling and understanding what is happening to them. After these remembrances, and present-tense "immersions" in former times, the narration returns to subsequent narration from the dry autumn of year two.

By displacing the point of narration itself to the previous year, the narrator reinforces the meaning of past events in his/her mind. These are the moments--in the present (the dry autumn of year two)--when the narrator creates the expectations that

will be the "barbs," the entangling clichés of his/her future. Rather than allowing memory to close around the events and give them some finality, the narrator re-immerses him/herself in the events, hoping to become the person s/he was a year before. The most eloquent of these, and the longest, occurs at a turning point in the narration (*and* in the story), when "Nara" returns to London in August and September of the story's second year (179-180). It begins at his/her return to a café where s/he and Louise had met regularly. This point is the beginning of the end of the fiction, when the character decides to give up his/her search for Louise and return to Yorkshire. From this point, the temporal points of narration change dramatically as we follow her/him north.

We begin with the past tense: "I ran over the road to the café" (179). The narrator remembers when the couple would go there and the things Louise would say. The second paragraph brings the focalization back to a point after those encounters with Louise at the café: "I had scrupulously avoided our old haunts--that's the advice in the grief books--until today. Until today I had hoped to find you." Suddenly the temporal point of narration is no longer at some point in the future and focused on the events in the past, but instead it has moved to that same day, as though the narrator were writing to Louise there in the café, or speaking his/her thoughts into a tape recorder. In the course of the reminiscences that follow, we hear of what is going on the café: "Since I've been in this café with a calvados and an espresso the door has opened eleven times" (180). We hear the process of her/his deliberations and thoughts: "I've been thinking of leaving London, going back to the ridiculous rented cottage for a while. Why not? Make a fresh start" (180).

My impression as reader was that we had finally reached the point of subsequent narration from which all the previous events had been recounted. But, although what happens in the café is narrated in the present tense, and the narrator's decision to leave London is made there, when s/he gets up to leave, a point even further in the future from which these things are narrated is brought to mind momentarily: "I paid and left." It is remarkable that it is principally in moments of inaction that the present-tense flashbacks take place. For example, Winterson has the narrator quit his/her present-tense reverie in the café, and uses the past tense to describe paying and leaving the restaurant. As soon as we enter the narrator's mind again, however, the present tense returns. In describing *simultaneous narration*, Genette observes that "if the emphasis rests on the narrating itself, as in narratives of "interior monologue," the simultaneousness operates in favor of the discourse; and then it is the action that seems reduced to the condition of simple pretext" (219).

Nara is telling him/herself stories. And it is these stories and their "reading" from the narrator's memory that make up the fiction of *Written on the Body*. Yes, we can follow the plot from London, to Oxford, to Brighton, to London, to Yorkshire, but this book is certainly not about action: everything takes place in a narrator's mind. The story in terms of plot does not begin until we reach the last page; it is the discourse that is emphasized in *Written on the Body*. The inventions of the narrator in telling the stories shape the fragments of memory into a new whole (*Art Objects* 146). But it is not until s/he gives up the search for his/her present self in past events that the "romance

and courtship and whirlwind" (53) that cause his/her fear can be left behind. S/he then allows his/her experience to speak.¹⁰ No clichés can tell him/her any longer what it is s/he feels. After visiting a cemetery, becoming grounded in the fact of life and death, s/he knows it will bring nothing to remain in the inevitable past. After the time in the café, s/he allows the future in to counterbalance the past, and his/her life, if sadly, to dance again.

However, the reveries brought on by the café are not over just because the narrator is walking down the street; the next paragraph enacts the most intense immersion in the past yet. Even as the narrator "actively" walks back to his/her apartment, she pretends it is a year earlier: "Out here in the street, striding purposefully, I can give the impression that I've got somewhere to go" (181); the narrator throws him/herself into an act.

There's a light on in my flat and you'll be there as arranged with your own key. I don't have to hurry, I'm enjoying the night and the cold on my cheeks. Summer's gone, the cold's welcome. I did the shopping today and you said you'd cook. I'll call and get the wine. It gives me a loose-limbed confidence to know you'll be there. I'm expected. There's a continuum. There's freedom. We can be kites and hold each other's string. No need to worry the wind will be too strong.

Here I am outside my flat. The lights are out. The rooms are cold. You won't come back. Nevertheless, sitting on the floor by the door, I'm going to write you a letter with my address and leave it in the morning when I go. If you

get this please answer, I'll meet you in the café and you'll be there won't you.

Won't you? (181)

Of course, once the act is over and the lights in her/his apartment are *not* on, the current reality crashes in. And yet we are still in the present tense; this paragraph returns to the simultaneous narration of the café, but there are no more memories. It is as if we have reached the point from which the whole novel has been told, and now we are moving forward. From this point to the end of the novel, the temporal point of narration is either in the present tense or subsequently narrated, but there are no shifts to points in the past.

The narrative now moves back and forth from subsequent narration (told from what point in the future?), to simultaneous narration, something Genette calls *interpolated* narrating, in which

the story and the narrating can become entangled in such a way that the latter has an effect on the former. . . . This type of narrating can also be the most delicate, indeed, the one most refractory to analysis, as for example when the journal form loosens up to result in a sort of monologue after the event, with an indefinite, even incoherent, temporal position. (217)

We are treated (willing or not) to Nara's inward "chatter" on the train, but when we hear again of his/her emotional state, the present tense returns. While actions such as running in the train station and the wheezing train shuddering (182) are told in the past tense, thoughts and the stationary musings of the train come to us from now: "I know I'm running away but my heart has become a sterile zone where nothing can grow"

(183). It is not until s/he gets out of the train and is walking that the future point of narration re-emerges. "I could have got a taxi that late night, not chosen to walk six miles without a torch" (184-85). During the walk, the narrator's inner anguish returns in the present tense--"I miss you Louise" (186)--but the final descent to the cottage is all told from a future time.

Not resigned to move into that expected future time, the narrator sits gloomily with Gail Right prompting him/her. The narrator expects "if not the proper then the inevitable" (188) ending to the story. The narrator feels s/he is "becoming less and less present" (188), and all narration is in the past tense. The realistic subsequent narrator waits for the resigned voice to accept the deadening future. When Louise's face appears, it is not until Louise kisses the narrator's fingers that that present returns, that the past and future are once again balanced: "I put out my hand and felt her fingers, she took my fingers and put them to her mouth. The scar under the lip burned me. Am I stark mad? She's warm. . . . This is where the story starts . . ." (190) *This* ending/beginning is the one that the narrator never suspected, never found comfortably curled in the cliché-armchair of his/her memory and narrated in the past tense with its inevitable ending. Giving up writing the repeat novel (*Art Objects* 191), this narrator gives up the inevitable future point of narration from which consensus spreads like a bad prognosis, and finds an unexpected beginning.

No analysis of temporal positions and their ramifications for interpretation in Winterson's fiction would be even remotely respectable without a look at *Seeing the Cherry*. The two principal narrators of the book are the Dog-Woman and her son, Jordan. My interest focuses on the contrasting ways in which these two narrators describe the events of their lives, and the effect these narrative styles have on the reading experience. While the Dog-Woman tells a rollicking tale, she is confident, not seeking out change, nor looking for ways to change her view of the world. Her journey is bound by the dates she recites, events of objective history, and clock time. Jordan makes an outward *and* an inward journey, and the lines between one and the other are never clear. Does he visit Fortunata for a month on a Bermudan island with Tradescant in the offing, or is the island somewhere else? And, whose month is it? An analysis of the use of tense in *Seeing the Cherry*, and of its use of subsequent and simultaneous narration, bears some interesting fruit.

The book uses pictures of fruit as section markers. Small bananas precede the Dog-Woman's narration; small pineapples precede Jordan's. When we encounter these characters' 20th-century counterparts, Nicolas-Jordan's stories are marked by pineapples split in two, and those of the chemist/activist, by severed bananas. Other sections have titles. Only one section bears no marker, but the entire section appears in italics. Exactly in the middle of the book (on page 72 of a 144-page book), in simultaneous narration, is a description of Fortunata's dancing school.

Generally, while exchanging voices back and forth, both the Dog-Woman's and Jordan's narrations appear to progress through their own time-lines. The Dog-Woman's

narration begins somewhere near 1640 and stretches to 1666 and the Great Fire of London. Jordan's periodically return to familiar British "historic" years when he returns to London from his travels with Tradescant. His travels, however, contain both interior and traditionally "historic" moments. The royal gardener, Mr. Rose, reminds the court that Jordan's presentation of the pineapple is "an historic occasion. Indeed it was" (104). Generally, though, Jordan's travels defy clock time, slipping between the ticking hours and minutes. The connections between the world Jordan discovers and the one the Dog-Woman lives in becomes tenuous, and a silent tension builds between the two.

The Dog-Woman's stories follow British "history" along the usual calendar time-line with a few interjected projections (15-16) and "extradiegetic" memories (107). She begins with Jordan's naming, sometime around 1630 (11), and describes the first time a banana was presented to the London public some three years later (11-13). She then goes back to describe her virtual archeological find of Jordan as a baby in the mud of the Thames (14). These three events are described from a point in the indefinite future, possibly from beyond the frame of events of the novel; she then jumps ahead to a much later outing with Jordan (15-16). Her narrative then returns to a more or less chronological account of her relationship with her son, beginning when he was 10 years old and met Tradescant, a royal gardener and explorer (21-24). Most of the Dog-Woman's stories are attached to political and historic events in British "history." She plays major roles in the Civil War (26-28, 63), the trial of Charles I (64-71), and the defeat of the Puritans (73-89). A pineapple is presented to the King in 1661 (104, 129), and she lives heartily if sadly through the plague of 1665 (138-142), after which

she does her bit in purifying the city by fire in 1666 (142). Finally, she escapes the city of London with her son during the fire (143-44). As the book progresses, the Dog-Woman's experience of time is held down by clock time, politics, and her own weighty influence.

The Dog-Woman and Jordan narrate approximately 35 sections each. The Dog-Woman narrates well over three quarters of her sections in the past tense, although the temporal point of narration moves forward in time. A typical section by the Dog-Woman begins with a present-tense contemplation and quickly moves into the past-tense narration of a particular event that illustrates her musing. For example, when she arrives at the Royal Gardens at Wimbledon in 1643, the section begins with a question, "What is love?" (34). It moves into the past tense momentarily to place her musing chronologically in the context of her life: "On the morning after our arrival at Wimbledon I awoke in a pool of philosophic thought . . ." (34). But the temporal point of narration in the future quickly disappears as she throws herself back into that pool: "I am too huge for love." She considers her size, and describes the iterative event--contemporary with 1643--of the local parson who requires that his parishioners "contemplate their sin." She moves easily between descriptions of customs and hobbies (church-going, dog-breeding) to personal emotions. When, finally, she fixes on a particular event, she switches to the past tense--"I fell in love once"--whereupon she tells us the story of her only heart-felt love in the past tense, to the end of the section. Other than the larger-context temporal-positioning at the start of the section, the temporal point of narration is 1643, and the past event she tells of (falling for the tinker) took

place sometime in her youth beyond the confines of the story, before Jordan appeared. She evokes, in the easy movement from specific memories to current events, the continuous and linear passage of time from her youth to the current point of narration. She admits, though, that in her memory only certain incidents, and not the passage of time, have taken hold (108). That "passage of time" remains an indisputable fact, however, despite the fact that it eludes her.

As the Dog-Woman's stories progress through *Sewing the Cherry*, the temporal point of narration also advances to new vantage points sometime after the events that are recounted, so that the events she tells of happened in the recent or distant past. The subsequent narration, interjected with present-tense musings, give an 18th-century epistolary novel effect to her story. After the accounts of Jordan's childhood and the day-trip to sea, the temporal point of narration returns to soon after the events narrated, and slowly moves into the future. She "exploit[s] the narrative situation propitious to the most subtle and the most 'irritating' counterpoints: the situation of the tiniest temporal interval" (Genette 218). Her narrative is marked with current events, like the visits to church in puritan days, and the worries about Jordan as he grows up: "When Jordan is older I will tell him what I know" (41). Statements like "Here at Wimbledon . . ." (41), "The pineapple arrived today" (104), and "London is consumed with the plague" (138), also date the narrative itself to particular moments or days in a linear time-line. Her movement from current musing, to the subsequent narration of recently past events, to memories of the distant past and back again, brings us very close to her own movement through the story and interpretation of events as they pass. Her

personal opinions and boisterous enthusiasm by no means bring decorous consensus to the narrative, but one is inclined to question *her* interpretation, rather than question the basis of one's own reality.

The Dog-Woman's temporal markers are linked to calendar time, and her life represents one thoroughly weighted down by it. She dreams of keeping the future at bay (67), whereas Jordan longs for travel. Within himself, Jordan challenges and twists what he sees to the breaking point in order to free himself from time. He resolves to burst the bounds of the humdrum clock-bound existence, and discover within himself the other lives he is convinced he lives concurrently with the one he is conscious of. One of the symbols he uses to think about himself is the palimpsest, with many lives lived and written on his memory. He finds evidence of this other life, and "gradually it appear[s] before [him]" (10). It is this desire to move swift as a current and float with words into the air that drive him from his home life; he understands that what he loves is not happening there. Jordan's adventures in *Sexing the Cherry* are driven by a profound desire to move beyond the ways of knowing that he grew up with, and into an infinitely expanding consciousness. In the words of holographic physicist David Peat, Jordan is ready to experience the "human mind . . . extending throughout society and nature, moving through orders of increasing subtlety, reaching past the source of mind and matter into creativity itself" (235). Jordan regularly "flies" from the "objective reality" in which his mother lives. He escapes the "weight of the world" (which could be taken literally to *be* his mother) by "leav[ing] his body where it is, in conversation or at dinner, and walk[ing] through a series of winding streets . . ." (17). All of Jordan's narrations

are full of empty space, points of light, and flying, the weight of worldly politics hardly affects him.

Travelling through, or in, or with, time, is at the centre of *Saving the Cherry*.

There is a certain traceable linearity and purpose to Jordan's travels. Trouble begins for him at the age of three when he first "sets sail" (13); and, throughout his narrative, "in [his] games with ships and plants, [he tries] to return to that memory, to release whatever it [began] in [him]" (100). He visits with a family whose entire life is lived suspended from ropes (20-21); this is where he first meets the object of his passion, but loses sight of her and spends much of the book thereafter looking for her, never sure whether the person he is looking for is in fact himself (80), or if he has already found her and is remembering her (93). He begins his search through a whorehouse (30), travels foreign lands as a woman (31), and is carried to another city by birds (33). Next, during his travels with Tradescant, he goes to a city that is constantly torn down and rebuilt (42). Riding on the blade of a windmill, he swings himself up to talk to the miller of this town, who advises him to consult the 11 dancing (and flying) princesses who were themselves dancers and might know the whereabouts of the woman he seeks (43). He gains a clue from them that she is in fact their long-lost sister, Fortunata (60). After hearing their stories, he looks for his love in a city whose population is wiped out three times over by a plague of love (75). He then rejoins Tradescant (78) and, coming to an island, searches for and finally finds Fortunata (92), his desire, and 12th of the 12 dancing princesses. He stays with her a month, and leaves, as she does not need to leave her island to travel (100), and Jordan knows Tradescant will not wait much longer

(103). The only event of his travels that is not placed in this meandering progression is his visit to the Hopi tribe, whose language has "no tenses for past, present and future. They do not sense time in that way. For them, time is one" (134-135).

The narration suggests that Jordan has certain adventures before others, but the question of how long any of his journeying takes is a question that has "no meaning" (135), as many of his experiences wax and wane in the line of time and it is not particularly clear which comes when in the course of his journeys with Tradescant. The Dog-Woman is the one attached to clock time, and she tells us that when Jordan returns from his longest voyage, he is 33, and the year is 1661. Perhaps he stays in London the five years until the Great Fire in 1666; perhaps he escapes to find his other selves. Whereas time plays an important role the Dog-Woman's life, for Jordan it is a medium more plastic and uneven.

Jordan's sections are often simultaneously narrated, and are dotted with fables and vignettes of fantastic stories, representing his inner/outer travels; the Dog-Woman's are traceable to one time-line. While she meditates in her "pools of philosophic thought" about her experiences, for the most part, it is the experiences that trigger the thought, and not the other way around. She is a woman of action. I counted eight sections within Jordan's stories that break off altogether into other philosophical "lagoons," on the Nature of Time or theories of the Flat Earth. It is these musings that propel Jordan. While the Dog-Woman is moved by "our common experience," it is "indisputable" arguments (81) of a deductive and theoretical nature that motivate Jordan: it is the possibility of the life "squashed between facts" (10) that drives him to

discover other realities.

Jordan warns us that his account might not be the usual one right at the beginning by stating that "[e]very journey conceals another journey within its lines: the path not taken and the forgotten angle. These are the journeys I wish to record" (10). Even after he finds his lover, Fortunata, he realizes that the search was really not for her alone, but for himself, and that "[w]e are alone in this quest, and Fortunata is right not to disguise it, though she may be wrong about love" (102). His journeys are double, and he keeps a log of both that inward search and his "completable" (102) journeys with Tradescant.

I've kept the log book for the ship. Meticulously. And I've kept a book of my own, and for every journey we have made together I've written down my own journey and drawn my own map. I can't show this to the others, but I believe it to be a faithful account of what happened, at least, of what happened to me.

Are we all living like this? Two lives, the ideal outer life and the inner imaginative life where we keep our secrets? (102)

In fact he finds that the more he travels the more lives and possibilities lie ahead of him "I begin, and straight away a hundred alternative routes present themselves. Every time I try to narrow down my intent I expand it . . . I am confounded by the shining water and the size of the world" (102).

It is in the context of this view of life that he narrates his share of the sections in *Serving the Cherry*. A typical section by Jordan begins in much the same way the Dog-Woman's do, with a statement such as "In the world there is a horror of plagues" (73).

In illustration of his point, he finds particular stories, and to tell them switches to the past tense: "A man sold me a necklace made of chicken bones . . ." (73). After the illustration, he continues his commentary, like his mother switching to simultaneous narration to relate his innermost thoughts and feelings, and illustrating with narratives from the past.

In a typical section by Jordan, he begins by explaining some of the lessons he had learned about love. He breaks into the fable of a city he visited whose citizens had died of a plague of love three times, and where, as a consequence, love had been outlawed. During his visit to the city, he contaminates it with love once again by playing a guitar. The citizens gather round to hear his music, and begin their own private revolution of love. Jordan escapes when the police come to enforce the law, and tells us that "years later, [he] heard that from that night the plague of love had overtaken the city once more . . ." (78). Jordan places this adventure then, in the context of his travels with Tradescant: "When I left the city where love is an epidemic I rejoined Tradescant's ship and we continued our course towards the Bermudas" (78).

In the next subsection Jordan explains his and Tradescant's hope "to make more of a success of the new fashion of grafting" (78). In an elaborate metaphor of self and other, Jordan finds his profession of gardening slides neatly into place beside his profession of love. His need to "take advantage of" another--"perhaps tender or uncertain," perhaps "hardier"--and so produce a third kind, without seed or parent, is exactly mirrored in the horticultural grafting process. When he tells us how his mother reacted to the proposal of plant grafting, we find that she disapproves of tampering with

the world, which, she thinks, should "mate of its own accord" (79). The Dog-Woman persists in her action-before-thought way of life, while Jordan proudly presents to the world the female cherry, grown without seed and without parent.

In the next part of this section, Jordan slips away from Tradescant's ship to an island and begins musing. Landing his dinghy on an island, he again slips into an elaborate metaphor:

Islands are metaphors for the heart, no matter what poet says otherwise.

My own heart . . . has never been visited, and I do not know whether it could sustain life.

In an effort to find out I am searching for a dancer who may or may not exist, though I was never conscious of beginning this journey. . . . Only in the course of it have I realized its true aim. . . . I thought I might become someone else in time, grafted on to something better and stronger. And then I saw that the running away was a running towards. An effort to catch up with my fleet-footed self, living another life in a different way.

Time and place have no meaning, space and place have no meaning on this journey. All times can be inhabited, all places visited. . . . The journey is not linear, it is always back and forth, denying the calendar, the wrinkles and lines of the body. (80)

Jordan's sections abound in metaphors, which he accepts to be as true as any other adventure. He believes in the other lives in the same way that he believes in the indisputable fact of his mother. He is searching for the right seed, the right match of

plant, within or without, from which a new and stronger, transformed self can emerge. To sex this new plant will be to know it and name it as new, a product of ingenuity and adaptability. Jordan's mind skips from one metaphor to another, leaping gracefully from world to world. His journey cannot be linear, except in its telling. Bound by this, he gives us some sense of the multiplicity of his journeys by quickly leaping from metaphor, to Tradescant's ship, to fable, to elaborate parable images.

In this particular section, after Jordan's musing about time, we are presented with "The Flat Earth Theory," another elaborate metaphor for the friction between perceived reality--believed in so heartily by the Dog-Woman--and the image we draw of it: the theory that "appears indisputable" (81). Maps, he says, are "the subjective account of the lie of the land. Rough shapes of countries that may or may not exist, broken red lines marking paths that are at best hazardous, at worst already gone" (81). These, he believes, can be made over and over again, with each new subjective landscape.

To illustrate, he begins a series of what he calls "Hallucinations and Diseases of the Mind" (presumably because that is what others call them), in which people immersed in one life are suddenly transferred to another, and either recognize or have no recall of what is in front of them, and act accordingly. All these paragraph-long parable images are told in the present tense, with interjections by the characters themselves. From these illustrations, Jordan makes certain conclusions about the nature of time and reality, and the truths he had been told about them (83).

This brings us to the end of this particular section told by Jordan--musings,

stories, fables, histories, parables, theories. Whereas on the whole the temporal points of narration do not take on any more unusual a pattern than they do in the Dog-Woman's sections, they tell of the world governed not by linear and objective time but by an expanded reality bridging Jordan's inner and outer worlds. His inner world is populated too. This is not just a metaphor for his subconscious but the meeting of souls in a collective unconscious. Did Jung imagine our actually going to live there? Jordan does. One of the "Lies" Jordan discovers is "Reality as something that can be agreed upon" (83).

He tells most of his stories in the past tense, but they exist in a world where time is not continuous with the historical one of the Dog-woman. The reader must then discard any desire to link each story to the trajectory of Jordan's life during the Civil War, which continues concurrently. The point from which Jordan tells his stories is not clearly determined. The Dog-Woman's stories conform to historical time, and when she tells us her wild adventures we can always decide she is exaggerating or going beyond the "truth" of something happening in an objective world. Jordan's travels take place in a world that knows the power of its self-creation, one that draws its own maps. The metaphors he uses to illustrate his thoughts become as important as the subject of the story.

The relationship of the Dog-Woman to the story she tells is that of the traditional narrator, assessing the past, drawing it together in her own consensus. She is to some degree identifiable as the traditional "unreliable narrator." She draws on the historical and objective "reality" of the reader's world by claiming to live in it. But that very world

becomes fantastic. She outweighs an elephant, kills hundreds of Puritans with impunity, uses their teeth to drain her watercress bed, etc., etc. The more sober and serious Jordan, on the other hand, lives deliberately in a world beyond the vision of the Dog-Woman's. He virtually eschews the reader's "reality." Far from validating his own experiences by drawing a time-line that is co-extensive with the reader's, he invites us into a world that goes beyond any objective one, where self and objective reality, self and other co-mingle in images, words, and experiences that defy the laws of physics.

The diary form that both Jordan and the Dog-Woman use to tell their stories, alternating between present-tense commentary and past-tense story, gives their narration a personal and seemingly real touch. The fantastic material of their lives--and its discontinuity with objective time in the case of Jordan--do not coincide with realistic requirements of continuous time, a properly closed sense of futurity, or any coordinating system. The narrators do not represent the world as we know it--do not even present one world. We do not know if the future from which Jordan tells his stories is in fact the past:

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)

Neither Jordan nor his mother succeed in consensus-forming that is convincing in the realistic sense. However, while the Dog-Woman is convinced of a singular world, and an objective reality, Jordan's world is multiple and his are journeys many and

concurrent. With Jordan, we are asked to believe in a future unimagined and a journey into the unknown. In the Dog-Woman's opinion, "we all rot"; Jordan explains:

[T]he future and the present and the past exist only in our minds, and from a distance the borders of each shrink and fade . . . even the most solid of things and the most real, the best-loved and the well-known, are only hand-shadows on the wall. Empty space and points of light. (144)

For Jordan, who is and is not himself, always a form transforming, the future is an infinite place and time, and is one of infinite possibility. Though both characters move forward at the end of the novel, the Dog-Woman's past is tied up with a long line of memory, and from that future she will always look back at it and fix the package with the new line that forms as she goes. We sense that she continues onward. Jordan's final word disintegrates what is ahead of him into an infinity of lines.

We soon learn, as readers of *Seving the Cherry*, that several worlds are presented to us. The voices that emerge are not only of the two principal narrators. Fortunata's voice, the voices of the 11 dancing princesses, the voices of characters in the stories the two principal narrators tell, and the voice of the narrator of the centre section on Fortunata's dance school are all scattered throughout the book. The alternating voices of Jordan and the Dog-Woman present first the historical world of the Civil War (in an exclusive report from a very special point of view) and then Jordan's world of sea and spirit travel. Together with the interspersed voices of the other narrators, these voices each present another view of the world, even another world. The most obvious coordinating force in *Seving the Cherry* is the glue binding and cover, the pictures of fruit,

and the recurring references to British "history." Images such as "the shining water and the size of the world" (16, 17, 102), "empty space and points of light" (8, 72, 91, 93, 120, 144), and themes of gravity and weightlessness, love and identity, serve as binders as well. Recurring stories, told from different points of view, such as Fortunata's school (72, and 93) and Nicolas-Jordan's travels in time (82, 121), create a sort of continuity that hold the structure of *Sexing the Cherry* together.

So we return once again to "the principle that invented the narrator, along with everything else in the narrative, that stacked the cards in this particular way, had these things happen to these characters, in these words or images" (Chatman, *Story* 148). The implied author enters again, perhaps even her editor, or her publisher, who all have a hand in helping her find the structure and presentation she seeks. It is very unlikely that Jordan's ship will bring us into a future like the one we have left; a burning city leaves little option but flight. This book does not borrow from any reality I have known; instead it appears to be "highly wrought, highly artificial and resolutely outside the mimicry of Realism" (*Art Objects* 72).

3 “*To represent was not enough . . .*”

3.1 *Coordinating Systems*

In the many interior monologues in Winterson's fiction we are reminded again and again of the powerful role the individual can play in the creation of his/her own reality. In this respect, her fictions bear a similarity to realistic work; individual will as *shaper*. But the critical difference is that, in realism, the individual ostensibly works to shape an external reality to meet her/his needs, and in Winterson's work the reality itself is both internal and external. The notion that "reality" is shaped by individuality is, in Winterson, one about the nature of reality, not about the power of individual will wrestling with universal and concrete external reality. We could say that, though realism sought better to acknowledge the influence of environment on the subject than did the romantic literature of Radcliffe (for example), Winterson and later writers bring this possible process one step further. A Winterson-reality is one where the individual's interpretive work is acknowledged as part of the process of creation. In its own turn, society is seen radically to shape our interpretive biases, and to limit or expand our view of what we encounter. The resulting reality is one that shifts, acting in continual symbiosis with social expectations, individual psychological processes, and physical and economic pressures.

In realism it is important that circumstances *not* shape identity, that the characters remain at least ostensibly free to choose, and that they "naturally" choose from a culturally limited range of options. In Winterson's fiction, characters are always to some degree deeply and inescapably bound by their "surroundings." While a

character's interpretations create her reality, she also can be thrown at a world by seemingly outward circumstances. Picasso, in Winterson's *Art & Lies*, both contributes to and is constrained by her family and the suffering she goes through in living with them. At moments she is St. George fighting for freedom, but at others we know she has been so largely determined by them that an act of heroic martyrdom is hardly possible. She is not the cohesive individual fighting a pitched battle against a redefined "sin, the world, and the devil." The world is seen too much as being of her devising and she is seen too much as a product of her world. There is a lack of familiar realistic solidity of character, and a lack of the plausibility and unchanging quality of an external world in *Art & Lies*. The model could be seen as holistic, with self and environment in constant symbiosis. The point is--given the inescapability of bias--to give the inner world credit for the power it plays in our conception of the world. In this both-inner-and-outer world, every perception creates a new world. It is possible to discover "gaps" or neutral zones between these worlds that could not be conceived in the apparent seamlessness of a singular world, humanly conceived and encapsulated. The radical differences between singular perceived realities and the variety of possible connections between them make the world a place of infinite potential for *any* kind of connection. It becomes easier for an individual to find cracks in the veneer of the humanistic sense of reality to slip through: Jordan finds his dancer; David Picasso escapes; Handel learns to sing, and Louise reappears alive in spite of all the expectations of doom on the part of her lover. Rather than claiming a dubious freedom in an objective world, Winterson's characters claim a freedom *from* it.

In a world whose make-up is partially internal, interpreted, envisioned, and partially external, "real", seen, the balance of power lies as much within as in the hard truths of concrete reality. At times, Picasso is able to create her own story over and above her family's voices. In this kind of world, Picasso can fall prey to caricature or typology on one page, seem like a true nineteenth century character on the next, and on the next appear wholly within her own created world, swinging from century to century with the greatest of ease. Art and archetype are for a moment synonymous, only to be transformed into a symbiotic mutually creative form the next moment.

This reality is, as a result, multiple. Every individual holds on to and shapes their own reality, and makes choices according to their own complexity of understanding, interpretation, circumstances, and indoctrination. Many of the factors that go into making up that complexity overlap among individuals. It is in the space and time of this overlap that profound communicative connections and ties are made. It is through these connections that individuals come to develop a sense of community and a wider responsibility for each other in a postmodern world. The patterns formed by these overlaps are to a great extent shaped by cultural biases and influences, and by individuals' various reactions to them, but are otherwise quite arbitrary; there is no coordinating system, other than those of constructed cultural norms, our interpretations, and our creative reactions to those norms. In the realistic novel, we are ready to believe that those cultural norms were overarching moral principles, ordained, if not by God, then by a natural and/or transcendent order. It did (and does) not disturb the readers of realistic novels to find that the outcome of fictional events

reaffirmed that order; this was (and is) simply a reaffirmation of the norms that "keep society as we know it going."

Winterson's characters, rather than reaffirming eternal truths about an objective reality ("lies"), are studies in the various ways in which we are ensnared by societal expectations not of our own choosing, and the ways in which we can ever-so-slowly learn artfully to transform our own realities by the bumps and curves of our lives and how we recover from them. Each character has constraints and freedoms, both of perception and circumstances. And each character tells us his/her own story, sometimes during, sometimes after, and sometimes before events "happen." This results in a text where coordination of apparently disparate elements happens not because of an external order reaffirmed by the text nor because of events finally united in consensus by a single narrator. Instead, on a diegetic level, the events and themes of Winterson's fiction are usually coordinated either by characters who choose a similar path (Picasso and Handel both choose to leave London); or by the act of a character that moves outside of our usual perception of temporal and physical limits (Sappho rescues Picasso as she falls from the roof). On the narrative level, recurrent images, the order of narration, and some semblance of temporal linearity emerge to hold the enactment together.

The characters struggle with their socialization and prejudices, trying to go beyond them. As each character speaks, we hear the struggle of individuals trying to find their own voices amidst a din of expectations. Handel knows he is to some degree "dumb inside a borrowed language," and while Picasso knows that, she "is still [her] own,"

though her "lungs, liver and tongue" have been devoured by her family's abuse (154).

In *Art & Lies*, society's expectations and clock time work as great deadeners. A leitmotif of the novel is the presence of death in life. One of the thoughts that recurs in the book is taken from T.S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton": "that which is only living/can only die" (ll. 138-139; *Art & Lies* 64, 67, 133). The theme is "concentrated . . . into that single line" (*Art Objects* 170) and reveals itself in Sappho's fears:

The spirit has gone out of the world. I fear the dead bodies settling around me, the corpses of humanity . . . I fear the executive zombies, the shop zombies, the Church zombies, the writerly zombies, all mouthing platitudes, the language of the dead, all mistaking hobbies for passions. . . . Time mocks them but they do not hear. Their ears are full of the sports pages and the index of the *Financial Times*. (64-5)

We have become deadened to feeling, lacking the "emotional sympathy that should quicken in you and me when face to face we meet with pain. . . . And still we long to feel" (14). Jack Hamilton, the head of Picasso's unfeeling family, "can only love what is dead. . . . [he] had made sure that his wife was dead before he married her" (158). Her family's industrial complex comes close to killing her; her brother "embalms" her "with his fluid," lying over her, "like a winding sheet," she "his corpse" (154). Her father pushes her off the roof (158). Handel comes to account for his past life and finds that "every day he killed in himself the starts of feeling he feared. A daily suicide gone unnoticed by those who assumed he was still alive" (178).

It is from this death-in-life that the characters flee, "each fleeing a dead city, and

a life they can no longer bear. The dead city is a London of the future, a potential place without values" (*Art Objects* 160). Winterson's question to herself, "How shall I live?," is a question not only about what *kind* of life she will live, but about mere survival. How to survive the dullness of repetition that brings to mind Dickens's "Podsnappery":

getting up at eight, shaving close at quarter-past, breakfasting at nine, going to the City at ten, coming home at half-past five, and dining at seven. . . . Nothing to be permitted to those same vagrants the Arts, on pain of excommunication. Nothing else To Be--anywhere! (*Our Mutual Friend* 128-29)

What comes before death is a numbness; and numbness is caused first by protection:

We had to protect ourselves. . . . Protection always involves some sort of loss. Hold back, watch yourself, wrap up, look for cuts, mind the blood, don't exchange fluid, Now Wash Your Hands Please. The riskiest thing you can do is to be naked with another human being. (*Art & Lies* 9)

Handel finds human nature too bitter: "the buried death-in-life, that still fears the grave. Having killed part of me, I fear it less than those who do their murdering with unconscious hands, the daily suicide that precedes all other crimes. Love of money. Fear of death. Twin engines of the human race" (114). Sappho describes the place Picasso is coming out of in terms of a protected isolation. "The rocky place of thistle and salt. The heart beat back so many times that it finds its only home in isolation. The isolated heart, that in protecting itself from pain, loses so much of beauty and buys its survival at

the cost of life" (135).

Protecting the self against the fear of death, we begin to take precautions that become habits, and life becomes a small round of repeated routine. This routine with its menacing machinery is what at all costs the passengers on the train at the beginning and end of *Art & Lies* are trying in some small way to leave behind. Death in the guise of power over feeling is the indoctrination--the strategy for survival--that moves unwitting characters in Winterson's fictions to a stagnant death-in-life, devoid of any even vestigial freedom or choice. For Picasso, this life of repetition is all lies. The lies are lived when feeling is denied. As a child, Picasso shares a room with her brother, who rapes her every night. When she tells her family they do not accept it, calling her a slut. This lie drives her with a passion to tell the truth.

Late at night, when each member of the family had gone to sleep in their rightful family bed, Picasso crept out on to her narrow stone staircase and felt the cold under her feet. . . . Cold not comforting, the way lies are comforting, so long as they can be believed. . . . She was out of the stoked-up conspiracy to lie. The fantasy furnace, where truth was chopped into little pieces, and burned and burned and burned. . . . She climbed the stairs . . . Who were those people whose bodies were rotting with lies? They were her family. (43)

The lie behind all this denial threatens to destroy her. She tells us that all day her mother "punished me with her rosary of lies, one after the other, murmured prayers for my destruction, enough lies and I will not know who I am. Picasso will not exist but the Lie can wear her clothes" (154). The same lies that killed her mother begin to kill

Picasso. She finally determines that a sense of self is what will allow her to stand out amidst all the torture of her family life, "[t]o get beyond everyone else's lies I shall have to cut a figure of my own" (162). Handel's past is a "string of successive damnations that bind what is left of the soul and force its future into the same thick moulds as its past. Small treacheries, hurtful lies . . ." (112-113).

The lies serve the purpose of keeping the soul from invention, from imagining difference, from knowing the unknown. The possibility of moving beyond the same old life over and over, and into a new world, is found in art. "Not even the Dutch genre painters, whom the Victorians so admired, had ever gone so far as to believe that the lifelikeness of a picture was more important than its quality and composition. . . . painter[s], however literal, knew that to represent was not enough" (161). Art has the power to cause reproduction. Sappho explains, "To match the silent eloquence of the world I have had to learn to speak. Language, that describes it, becomes me. Careful then, what I become, by my words you will know me" (138). Picasso tells us that she "collected quite a folio over the years" of her family's drawings of her, "and what I looked upon I became" (162). For this reason redundant form is Picasso's horror. She protests her father's injunction to paint likenesses. The lies that cause dullness and death, and from which the characters seek refuge, are the lies of reproduction and repetition.

The characters of *Art & Lies* cry out against the stagnant representations of themselves that are mere tired ideas. Before death-in-life comes dullness: the lie of representing oneself to oneself as something one is not, but as a lost form. True invention, the purpose of art in *Art & Lies*, seeks out and finds "that which exists" (199):

the truth that underlies the fiction. The last word of *Art & Lies* is not a word but the score for a trio from Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* in which the Marschallin says, "[T]he majority of things in the world are such that one would not believe them if one were told about them. Only those who experience it believe it and do not know how" (Von Hofmannsthal). Handel repeats the words both in his memory of himself as a boy (197) and later when he finally sees his old lover again (204). It is to find the self beyond the lies that art seeks to do: to deny the lies we like to tell ourselves about who we are, and to bring us suddenly up against the immediate person. To bring one beyond representation to a recognition of self. Lies, then, are the opposite of life.

Art & Lies is the story of escape from the dead city, and from the stultifying self-perpetuation of Podsnappery that goes on in it: "Against the daily death the iconography of wings" (114). Handel quits his city, "never to return" (26), described by friends as having too much feeling. He escapes the life that buried all his feeling. Remembering her "fall" from the parapet, "and the resolution of wings," Picasso finally finds a way to leave her family. Sappho sees Picasso's flight: "She made wings out of feathers she found" . . . and calls her ICARUS (73). Wings feature in *Sexing the Cherry* as well; Fortunata asks Jordan, "what about your wings? . . . How can you forget those when the stumps are still deep in your shoulder-blades?" (100). Fortunata is the consummate flyer of *Sexing the Cherry*, beginning with her career as a dancing princess, and later she flies from her island to any sea or city she wishes. Handel realizes that it is the repetition of form that represents the dullness and death of City life: "The world of everyday experience is a world of redundant form. Form coarsened, cheapened, made

easy and comfortable, the hackneyed and the clichéd, not what is found but what is lost" (199). Once he understands this, he seeks his escape from the moribund and into an invented world. "Invention then would return to us forms not killed through too much use. Art does it. And I? Why should I not live the art I love?" (199).

"Art defeats Time," says Sappho (67). By first defeating time, the characters begin to move beyond the expectations of normalcy. Before Picasso holds on to her freedom, the burning life within her prompts her to do things that land her in the hospital of Saint Sebastian the Martyr. Picasso is considered crazy and is told she is making "no progress." She, on the other hand, recognizes her progress and, though she returns to her family, she is ready to leave them for good. Handel's life has been a series of disastrous mistakes. He denies his love for the only woman he ever loved, he removes the wrong breast in a mastectomy, he refuses an abortion to a poor immigrant woman who was raped, he deserts the first man who really loved him: not a good track record. He is pompous around his colleagues and buries his feelings. All in all, he is not a particularly attractive person. But he never poses as the villain in *Art & Lies*. We don't find out at the end of the novel that his fatal flaws have led to complete dissolution. In fact, the opposite happens: he finds out it is not too late for him to learn another way of living. He has the chance to answer the question "How shall I live?," qualitatively, as well as in terms of survival.

The "reality" of Winterson's novels does not encourage a hierarchy of virtue administered by a coordinating system. The reality itself is created by each narrator and each bears its own mark of individual values. Marginalized and politically quite

incorrect characters are not abandoned for their oddity. Jeanette, of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* is quite an odd girl for most of the novel. Later, she is the outcast of her community, and yet she never loses the narrator's sympathy. In fact, the character herself, pushed about by her church and her mother, and formed by them, is far from exemplary in the way that Adam Bede is. Nor is she particularly demonic: she simply is the weird conglomeration of the society psychology, and possibility that make her up. We never "get to the bottom" of who Jeanette is or will become. Instead, it is the intensity of her experiences, and the magical moment, that hold meaning. The first-person narrator presents us with the picture not because she has crafted a plausible real character, but because, self-consciously, she has made her own creation. There is no abstract and reliable regularity to Jeanette, nor to the narrator, and no way of knowing what she will do next: there is no sense of perspective to her. There is no thesis to be proven right or wrong. Realistic generalizations, on the other hand, by "reducing the welter of particulars to some abstract regularity . . . represent an attempt to save the essences" (Ermarth, *Realism* 18). The "essence" of Winterson's characters and their journeys is their unending search for parts of themselves.

Picasso, mad painter, is painted purple, yellow, gold and silver from head to foot, and has no other clothing. The Dog-Woman is the size of an elephant. Handel, the man, has a neat incision for testicles. All these are lovable characters, and nothing like exhibits of the marginalized who we later find to be tragically flawed. We know they are tragically flawed from the start. But setting our sights on the possibility for growth, we live with the flaws. These characters are the centre of observation: the ones able to

stand out on their own and sing their own songs. The version of reality that condemns them is blown apart by the sympathy shown them, and the expanded reality seen through their eyes. When the narrator of *Written on the Body* deserts Louise, we prepare ourselves for the worst, the permanent loss. But the expected tragic consequence to the tragic mistake does not happen. Instead, the narrator is forgiven, and given the chance to believe in him/herself and to work out his/her own future in the years left of Louise's life.

The freedom to create their own values and reality is born from within the characters' inner convictions. The returning thought of *Art & Lies*, "the beatland of my body is not my kingdom's scope" (*Art Objects* 170), is at once an expression of Sappho's fear and her greatest hope. The view of reality Winterson discusses, presents in her characters, and cares about does not fit anyone into coordinated systems, but presents the individual confronted with infinite possibility: "le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis." "I have within, spaces as vast," recognizes Sappho, "if I could claim them" (137). The bridge to these spaces is Art, which

never concerns itself with the actualities of life, neither depicts it as we think it is, nor expresses it as we hope it is, and yet becomes it. Not representations, but inventions that bear in themselves the central forces of the world. (137-38)

The expressions of Art, according to *Art & Lies*, are just beyond our imaginings of what and who we are. When Sappho says that it "never concerns itself with the actualities of life," she talks of the deadly life as we know it. But when one looks at life in such a way

that "what appears is not what is" (52, 55)--given that we very likely are not what we decide we are and given our need "to get outside of common sense" (62)--the "actualities" of life can become a transformation of memory and sight. And, what will remain in such a reality? "What she hears or what she thinks she hears? What she sees or what she believes she sees?" (71).

Sappho's reality is an invented one. "I have to invent what I practise" (69), she tells us. She lives in a "pulled-apart open space, demolition of propriety, rebuilding of a place of worship" (66). In this reality it is unclear whether memory or invention is "truer" (136). The result of living in this way is to "shift the seeming solid world" (55).

We think we live in a world of sense-experience and what we can touch and feel, see and hear, is the sum of our reality. Although neither physics nor philosophy accepts this, neither physics nor philosophy has been as successful as religion used to be at persuading us of the doubtfulness of the seeming-solid world. This is a pity . . . because . . . a general agreement that there is more around us than the mundane allows the artist a greater licence and a greater authority than he or she can expect in a society that recognises nothing but itself. (*Art Objects* 135-36).

Winterson goes on to claim that "the artist does consider reality as multiple and complex," and that Art's "true effort is to open to us dimensions of the spirit and of the self that normally lie smothered under the weight of living" (136-37). Art presents to us "a place where the normal weights and measures of the day have been subtly altered to give a different emphasis and perhaps to slide back the sacred panel by the heart" (*Art*

Objects 43).

This world where concrete reality is returned to a shifting state is the reality we must accept in order to read *Art & Lies*. The book's poetic progression is particularly marked in the chapters dedicated to Sappho. The changes in tone and in narrator, the indefinite temporal points of narration, the discursive and poetic sections that break any kind of active movement of plot, bring us into Sappho's time-travelling, mind-travelling reality much more than a traditional realistic narrative would. One of the ways in which Sappho's world is shifted on a narrative level is that she narrates other characters' stories in the midst of her own. She falls in love with Picasso ["Let me see the web of scars made by your family's claws . . ." (136)]. Just before this, she tells us Picasso's state of mind after she recovers from her fall. The section (134-35) is told in the third person and in the past tense, and the localization is Picasso's:

She opened her eyes. She did live. Consciousness returning to the accelerated body. . . . She saw her past compressed into a single stroke of colour and it was the colour that made a bridge for her, not out of time, but through it" (134-35).

Sappho could be telling this from a temporal point beyond the confines of the book, when she knows Picasso, but it is just as likely that she slips into Picasso's life and tells us Picasso's story as though she were Picasso herself. It is unlikely this voice is not Sappho's; Picasso's story as told in this chapter is brought to us by Sappho's memory, intuited and known in her own way. The ambiguity of narrative position though, gives the text a free-floating sense of possibility. The section immediately after this one

returns to the first person, who is more clearly Sappho.

That Sappho falls for Picasso is not surprising; Picasso's father calls her "Sophia," her disowned christened name (157). Sophia was the name of Sappho's lover on Mitylene, and is the name of the ninth muse. Sappho calls to her, "Did I see you, Sophia, on a ledge in the night?" (132). The identities of most of the characters in *Art & Lies*--and especially in Sappho's chapters--merge and separate. Picasso and Sappho are each other's twin: both are artists, both attempt suicide. Picasso is Sappho's daughter, Cleis and she describes Sappho as "My mother smiling at the sea . . ." (91). Sappho, in her "bullet house" with its doors and windows welded against squatters (68), brings to mind the Spanish woman raped by Picasso's father, who escapes just before the doors to the tenement where she lived are welded into place (20). In this context it is easy for voices to begin speaking without the reader being given any references with which to identify them. One part of this chapter is spoken in a voice clearly not Sappho's. It is the voice satirizing a mechanized life-style: "Roll up! Art for all, tuppence a peep. No previous experience necessary. Every man his own connoisseur. . . . Art? Don't be silly. . . . I have a lunch appointment. How long will it take?" (141). The voice then regresses to tell the story of a long relationship with Time, "the tall, hooded man who played the Jack with me, when I was a child" (141-43); how Time chained the child and, walking faster and faster, ends by dragging the speaker brutally along. This voice is an illustrative or allegorical one. Sappho, perhaps, takes it on, acting out the part to illustrate her own thoughts.

Sappho's memories of her life in Mitylene return to her throughout this chapter.

It was a long time ago, and Sappho's memories are no longer clear, for "how many fantasies can force themselves into an infinitesimal space?" (30). "Memory. My licensed inventions. Not all of the fragments return" (136). She looks into the meaning of her days, finding a form for the emotion which plays back and forth with the words she finds (138). She lifts her memory from "the bath of self regard" (139), placing it from herself as an invention to which she may return for further work. Her two memories of Lesbos are dream-like and always permeated with the question of memory and invention. They provide a clean break from the dystopian world she now inhabits, with its graffiti, "bullet" houses, cranes, clock culture, raucous squad cars and their radios (68, 132-33, 135, 141).

The plot woven into *Art & Lies* involves three people who escape a dystopian London of the year 2000. It is about the pasts that drive them to leave, and the effects their escape has on them and the worlds they inhabit. The "story," in this sense, goes like this: Picasso's father, an acquaintance of Handel's called Jack Hamilton and preserve magnate extraordinaire, commissions a cancer hospital to be built across the street from the house where he lives. He puts Handel in charge of it. Picasso grows up in the house with her father; it is here that she attempts suicide, is pushed off the roof by her father, stands teetering on the ledge of the roof. Sappho, walking the night streets as she is wont to do, sees Picasso fall from the roof, rescues her, and falls in love with her. Picasso lives through her suicide attempt. Sappho clandestinely returns to the house many times. It is in the house across from the new hospital that Jack Hamilton rapes an unnamed Spanish charwoman. The woman becomes pregnant, and when

Handel refuses to sign papers for her abortion she resorts to living in a tenement, giving birth to the baby (delivered by Handel) and leaving it on the doorstep of Jack's house. Disgusted with his life, Handel leaves on the day that Picasso, finally ready to free herself, makes a triumphant exit from the house. When Sappho finally knocks on Picasso's door, Picasso has just left. Sappho follows her to the train station. These are merely the events this reader has chosen; the story of Handel's life goes back before that. We hear much of his life-story from childhood told from his vantage point at the age of 51. We hear Sappho's memories of Lesbos, and stories told by Handel's early lover, the old Cardinal Rosso of early-20th-century Rome. These more traditional timelines are scattered throughout the book in short sections and paragraphs, told sometimes from a point shortly after events, sometimes in simultaneous narration, and sometimes from a point a good deal later. Some stories are told more than once. It is not definitive, in these cases, that the event is "the same one," though some elements remain the same. These stories are *one* of the threads that make up *Art & Lies*. They are by no means the most important, but they provide a ground through which Winterson's thoughts and musings are transformed by characters and their relationships to their memories: "What makes up a life; events or the recollection of events? How much of recollection is invention? Whose invention?" (183). In *Art & Lies*, images and stories meld into an elaborate metaphors which eschews and disproves the strictures of its temporal medium.

In the Sappho chapter we just looked at, for example, of the approximately 510 lines of text only 140 are devoted to the story outlined above; about 300 are comprised

of Sappho's musings on language, love, and memory; 45 are lent to the story of a life lived in clock time; 25 to memories of Mitylene; which leaves just under two thirds of the chapter for Sappho's poetic flights and thoughts. *Art & Lies* is at least two thirds poetry: a long prose poem. Long lines are formed as one reads the book, linking fragmented images or events that recur (if slightly transformed). One of the strongest unifying themes in *Art & Lies* is "the book". The book Handel carries with him is a symbol of his past and his relationship to it. It is also the literary inheritance of many of the characters. It is the word written and seen as different from, but transforming the life lived. Handel opens the book (4), Ruggiero closes it (7); Picasso opens the book (79); Doll Sneerpiece and Picasso close it (80). Sappho writes in the margin (129, 168). Handel's book lights his face (4) and Sappho declares, "the page illuminates itself" (137). Sappho's books, if they had survived, she sighs, would not be rewarded for their literary merit. "There would be one burning" (and trivial) "question from out the burning book. . ." (141). The escape motif is reinforced by our periodically finding ourselves back in the train that carries Picasso, Handel, and Sappho to the sea. "The man," Handel, props his head on the book (171). He leaves the train with it (172). But, toward the end of the novel, when we meet Handel and his book again, is he still on the train. He slides a letter back into the book: the same letter we saw on the first page of *Art & Lies*. Handel's journey of the book is now revealed, and the number along the sword written, the rose picked. The *mysteries* of the book are not all answered, by any means, however, and Handel's flushing of memories at the end only makes "the book" more mysterious, more promising. We have followed with him in its reading and

its opening, but his own entry remains to be written. He holds on to the book at the last, and sings from the memories it contains. He finds a way through the memories, and a way to release the trapped pain within him.

In this last chapter devoted to Handel, which ends *Art & Lies*, Handel comes to the sea and opens his heart to himself. He is brought "face to face" with large tracts of feeling to which he "had lived back-turned for most of his life" (178). The past that he has kept "hidden away" (112) comes gushing forth, and he is in tears, remembering episodes of his life (a car crash 172-72; Picasso's father and her escape 173-76; the woman who needed an abortion 176-83; the mistaken mastectomy 188; his lover, the Cardinal, and his own castration-operation 189-99). Between these sections are descriptions of moments in which Handel realizes the importance of memory and its ability constantly to transform and enrich his present life. The penultimate pages of text in *Art & Lies* are given over to a short play: an interplay of memory and renewed hope among the three characters, gathered together now in a magical time and space. That space is many places: the rugged coast of England, their figurative departure, and the beginning of a transformed means of moving through life. Handel begins to see his painful memories differently: "His past, his life, not fragments nor fragmented now, but a long curve of movement that he beg[ins] to recognise" (206). In this short play, the three characters remember events and consider the future. The last page describes the three looking out to sea. Handel learns to sing out his grief and look toward a way of owning and knowing his life, past, present, and future. The two women stand together in an awareness of the inner and outer world constantly re-cast. It is a point not of

transcendence but of increased and more profound human contact.

The unity of the three characters at the end of the novel is one of trust and mutual understanding. It does and does not have to do with rain, cliffs and sea; or with their communicating and reaching a consensus. The image is both literal and figurative. The realities are intensely personalized, and their unity lies in the fact of their escape from the City, and their readiness for it, both physically and psychically. This unity could be called a natural one in that it comes together through their preparedness for movement into a life that carries a new dynamic to the past, a new presence to future endeavours. It is, more than anything, a figurative unity brought about by the possibility of a new reality which is itself brought about by the fiction.

Like that of *Written on the Body*, and *Saving the Cherry*, the future in *Art & Lies* is *not* the continuation of a reality like the one in the previous pages, and it does not continue to a single moment of narration sometime in "the future" of such a reality. We look out onto fields (*Written on the Body*), the sea from a ship (*Saving the Cherry*), and the sea from a cliff (*Art & Lies*) as people transformed and transforming. The coordination of events in these novels happens to some degree on a conscious level for the characters, but there is no narrator who knows more than they; no world more real or true than the one they have seen and keep inventing. The musical score that ends *Art & Lies* is not meant to be read perhaps, so much as to connote the sound of an actual performance. It is a trio which occurs at the climactic point of emotional disclosure and acquiescence from Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*. Again, the past and the future are brought together in a powerful moment of recognition. The trio occurs when a young man,

Octavian, acknowledges to his lover what she already knew, that he loves another more than her. While the Marschallin (the erstwhile lover) has known this change was happening, Octavian has not owned up--even to himself--to his change in emotion. The distance between the fidelity the earnest Octavian wants to believe of himself, and the reality of his love for Sophie is thrust from where it hid to the foreground, when he is forced to make a choice between the two lovers. His own false image of himself, and his love creates a sad tension, which the Marschallin realizes she must accept. The musical score shifts the medium of communication in *Art & Lies* itself into another form. The cohesion in time against the figurative effect of music makes this a precise postlude to the book.

3.2 Versions of Identity

In tracing the roots of postmodern identity, Elizabeth Ermarth observes that by the first half of the 20th century new concepts were emerging.

[T]wentieth-century phenomenology . . . massively revised the modern formulations of time and consciousness inherited largely from the seventeenth century, which formulated time as a categorical imperative "natural" to human thought and inseparable from the conception of the individual subject, the founding *cogito* that has developed its powers since then. By focusing on a phenomenal "event" in which subjectivity and objectivity cannot be distinguished, phenomenology anticipates the always-embedded and in-process post-modern subjectivity. (*Sequel* 8)

Fragmented and continually changing identity has been part of literature for a very long time; we have only to think of Tristram Shandy to trace *one* line to earlier writing. In Ermarth's analysis of realism, it is the tension built up between culture (the forces of consensus) and the individual that constitutes the form of realism. This tension reinforces a clear definition between subject and object, by first of all assuming their distinct separation. Winterson's work pursues this tension to the semiotics of identity, placing language at the centre of our sense of ourselves and blurring the clean line between culturally determined representation and the immanent self. When Handel of *Art & Lies* escapes his old life, he recognizes it to have been lies. His new life will afford him first a knowledge of his own and continuing indoctrination and the need to transform this indoctrination into a forum for negotiation with the normative self within him.

Winterson's characters, who are recognizable in the way that realistic characters are, also try to find ways of identifying themselves other than through the consistency of behaviour required by an identity that is discovered over time. Handel, Picasso, and Jordan *acknowledge* that, rather than being enabled and empowered by representations, they have fallen--or been forced--into parrot copy-work. A central struggle for the narrator in *Written on the Body* is to understand the self within him/her that is slave to what are stereotyped and prefabricated images of love and life. Acknowledging, then, the artificiality of these views of life, Winterson's characters engage in a battle against unquestioning complicity, against death. They set up a distance between the immanent self, constantly emerging, and the image or "word" of self. This distance allows some

small measure of freedom, a bridge, that in turn allows them some small element of choice. They learn to negotiate the self/image slavery and gain an element of agency in their self-construction. With the understanding that image and self are not written in stone, but are an artificial mixture of self, other, and environment, the characters begin their journeys (often at the end of the work) having gained a hand in their future lives. By the end of *Art & Lies*, Handel realizes the degree to which he has been a parrot (184-87), jessed and trained, and that small knowledge propels him to escape. In fact, he is learning to do what Sappho has known how to do all these centuries, to embrace the creative dance of word and image with the spirit of her life.

Winterson circumvents some of the requirements for the unfolding of character in realism first of all by rejecting linearity in her fiction. In *Sexing the Cherry* we are confronted with a person who has matured, and then with a young boy; the mature voice suddenly returns, and, by various clues, we perceive it is the voice of an adolescent. In *Written on the Body*, the narrator overloads the reader with flashbacks to the degree that it is easy to lose track of when s/he started. It is difficult to place any episode on a time-line. The fact that each episode is embedded in memory and personal perspective removes the need for linear and objective time; for if, as Jordan of *Sexing the Cherry* claims, the past and the present, and even the future, have possibly already happened--and it is simply our perception that makes it seem otherwise--then coming to a sense of any character's identity through a series in which s/he remains consistent (Ermarth, *Realism* 5) becomes less important.

The drama of character in Winterson's fiction is allied, not to their gradual and

predictable revelation, but to their individual struggle for that small measure of freedom. How that struggle happens is unique and critical for each, and it is these struggles themselves that the fiction is about. The sense of that struggle in general is the central metaphor of much of Winterson's work. As a result, a character's particular relationship to his/her own internal rhythm, and the struggle or acquiescence that rhythm sets up with clock time in the course of the novel are what provide the character and the reader with a sense of the character's identity. The way in which the reader perceives character has as much to do with the narrative rhythm, and recurring feats, images, or poetic epithets, as it does with events of the plot. And rather than providing a *consistent* and comprehensive knowledge of the character as one might present a new comprehensive grammar, intense images and connections of one character with another provide an experience of the character that may or may not be consistent with the last one or the next. It is not connective tissue, linking events in an objective reality together into a rational whole, that we focus on in Winterson's work, but rather, we are concerned with instances of difference and similarity as unique moments in a three-dimensional grid of time. A smooth, linear personal development presupposes a controlled, cohesive and progressive development. Fragmented time brings to mind the inconsistent and incoherent patch-and-puzzle-work of human identity and consciousness. In Winterson's fiction, the reader is not encouraged to find out an all-embracing rule of character identity nor does the role of narrator call for the octopodal task of gathering to itself consistent information. We are presented with the immediate present, and with memories that flash across the characters' minds at particular moments, and that is all.

There is no doubt that *one* of the strands in the weave that makes up any one of the three novels we are looking at is an objective sense of time. In *Sexing the Cherry* the Dog-Woman lives entirely within it. But when the reader cannot depend on consistent rules for recognition of a character, that character gathers about him/herself a multiple reality. In unique time-spaces, each character gathers a constellation of possibilities that are lived at once, some figuratively, some in a recognizable actuality, but all are "real." A realistic text anticipates each plausible event, and encourages the reader to verify whether a character remains consistent. In a less realistic text, the next event might well occur in another place and time, and with a new sense of the passage of both. Both the external "reality" as place, and clock time as continuous, are unreliable, dissolved in the present of an individual's perception.

It must be the narrator and the implied writer, then, that create the narrative image, condensed and artificial, of what we see; and this itself can be seen as the metaphor for the very artificiality of our consciousness of life: a sort of realism of artifice. The implied writer (in the case of the fiction), the individual and her/his own set of determining circumstances (in the case of life) create, for better or worse, the telling combinations.

In Winterson's *Written on the Body* it is never clear whether the principal narrator/character is male or female. Winterson does not give us the clues that would make it easier to know. By deliberately leaving these out, she draws attention to the narrator's role in choosing--"consciously" or not--what information is disclosed, and challenges the notion that the picture we receive in a realistic novel is unadulterated

"truth." Omitting gender markers points to their plasticity and provokes the reader to question the way we distinguish men from women and to question the givens that make up that assumed difference. The gender-mysterious narrator of *Written on the Body* wants to "penetrate" the beloved. Ideas that would usually identify a character as male or female (such as sexual "penetration") are put into doubt too. But given that Sappho talks of penetration with Sophia in *Art & Lies*, the indicator may not be as clear as it seems. *Written on the Body* asks the question, "exactly in which way is the information important?," challenging us to rethink the obvious markers of identity, of sexuality, and the sense that experience makes when one knows a person's gender--or, for that matter, any other information considered crucial in our society.

When there is a radical break with linear and objective time, full authority is given what might in realism have been called "but aspects" of personality. The characters are under no obligation to conform to a conventionally plausible or "sensible" social reality. The writer is no longer under obligation to put forth a world that is coherent unto itself, or that borrows from the reader's world. Jeanette's mother in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, for example, or the magical qualities of Dog-woman and Jordan in *Saving the Cherry*, are sympathetically portrayed in the context of broken time lines and interior realities. Differences between characters can also be quite radical. The absurdity of the horny and frumpy Gail beside the desperately bereaved narrator in *Written on the Body* illustrates how many worlds apart people can be. It is not that Gail and the narrator are in opposite frames of mind; rather, the combinations that make up their characteristics and interpretive perspectives are so radically different that they

seem literally to live in different universes. Gail's words enter the enormous space of bereavement like a ringing bell; they seem almost silly, but to some degree they draw the narrator crashing back into Gail's concrete world as though it were an alternative reality. This difference itself therefore becomes what the writing is, to some extent, about: the possibility of radical difference, and the generous allowance the earth makes for it.

Fragmented linear time precludes the possibility of assessing a character's traits over time and coming up with an abstract definition. While this fragments the character, it provides the liberty to immerse the self in the process of becoming. There is therefore a dynamism in the psychological drama we are thrown into in Winterson's fiction that we do not encounter in George Eliot's, for example. While the calculation and questioning of Eliot's characters certainly brings us into their minds, Winterson involves us in her characters' transformative processes by actually *discouraging* the formation of abstract categorizations for them. The challenge of this technique for the portrayal of identity is that the definition or understanding we gain of a character requires a legitimization of--a giving-credence to--experience that is not substantiated by anything but impression. And the reader must *also* be willing to give every grain of hope and belief to his or her own response.

It is the dilemma of authenticating his own experience that the 21st-century Handel struggles with in *Art & Lies*. He explains that if the scientific method requires more than one "objective" opinion to substantiate a fact, then "when I am alone, and the experience, the emotion, the event, was mine and mine alone, how can I say *for certain*

that I have not invented the entire episode, including the faithful memory of it?" (30). Winterson is not merely playing a logical game; she points out the source of self-doubt engendered by linear and empirical science, where impressions, conjecture, and personal and particular experience are considered a lesser quality of knowledge than clinically substantiated knowledge. Richard Rorty could be imagined encouraging Handel's question. In *The Consequences of Pragmatism*, he protests,

it is impossible to attempt to step outside our skins--the traditions, linguistic and other, within which we do our thinking and self-criticism--and compare ourselves with something absolute. This Platonic urge to escape from the finitude of one's time and place, the "merely conventional" and contingent aspects of one's life, is responsible for the original Platonic distinction between two kinds of true sentence [referential, and moral]. By attacking this latter distinction, the holistic "pragmaticizing" strain in analytic philosophy has helped us see how the metaphysical urge . . . works. It has helped us be skeptical about the idea that some particular science (say physics) or some particular literary genre (say Romantic poetry, or transcendental philosophy) gives us that species of true sentence which is not *just* a true sentence, but rather a piece of Truth itself. (xix)

What Winterson suggests is that no requirement of any scientific method can de-legitimize the authority of experience, and, on the contrary, nothing is more valuable. But that is not to say it represents an objective world. Rather, the inner world is very simply *as important* as any scientifically proven fact. At the beginning of

Iris Murdoch's *Bruno's Dream*, Bruno speculates:

There is just the dream, its texture, its essence, and in our last things we subsist only in the dream of another, a shade within a shade, fading, fading, fading. It was odd to think that Janie and Gwen and his mother and for all he knew Maureen now existed more intensely, more really, here in his mind than they existed anywhere else in the world. (13)

It is precisely this kind of existence that is legitimized by a narrative that breaks down linear time.

But none of this would hold water as realism, where universal time is all definitive. Linear time presents the characters and readers with an "objective" scale to which the whole of the "described" experience conforms. The reader constructs a timeline, and tries to make all events and characters add up to it. This is the "reality" that still holds in Western society, but which is increasingly challenged by the actual everyday experiences of individuals whose differences are being voiced more and more.

3.21 *The "Secret Life" Rediscovered*

If, as Ermarth describes in *Realism & Consensus in the English Novel*, identity in realistic convention can roughly be described as "the oneness or invariant structure by which we recognize a thing, by which we judge it under varying conditions to be the same" (5), it is necessary to believe in an objective time and reality within which a person can remain constant. When Handel is introduced in Winterson's *Art & Lies*, he is first a passenger spied on a train by another passenger, but later in the narration he is someone helping to

design a hospital, a resident out delivering a baby, a 17th(?) -century priest called Ruggiero, a 21st-century priest, a Roman Catholic sinner in a confessional, or an oncological surgeon. No didactic narrator pops his or her head in to tell us whether Handel is represented in the 17th-century character Ruggiero, for example. Ruggiero and Handel express many of the same views about passion and restraint (7, 31), and have many of the same tastes, such as a love for the opera (11, 13, 16, 28). The timelines in which they live, however, have no linear connection; it is possible that the 17th and 21st centuries are concurrent, and it is not clear that it is an objective consciousness that perceives or is perceived; the subject and object of view cannot clearly be distinguished.

It is not that Winterson tries to destroy the concept of historical time, but that she is too engaged in conceptualizing the world of space-time to give traditional Newtonian historicity much air-time . . . with the implication that "we get enough of that outside art." As Ermarth puts it, postmodern narrative "is an enactment that redefines time as a function of position, as a dimension of particular events"; its "sequences make accessible new temporal capacities that subvert the privilege of historical time which binds temporality in language" (*Sequel* 10-11). As we have seen, Winterson combines this kind of discontinuity with more traditional narrative use of time to achieve the effects of her fiction.

To think of Handel and Ruggiero as incarnations of the same spirit that has remained true over time forces precisely the sense of subjectivity that Ermarth insists is a Humanist construct. Though their similarities point to their being "incarnations of the

same spirit," their differences point equally to their being separate: different to the point of existing in ontologically different worlds and times. Their similarities and differences allow the reader to play with possibilities, rather than determine their identities with finality.¹¹ My particular response was to think of all the Handel-characters as expressions (figurative or literal) of a multiplicit personality: selves of not-always-determinate nature within him that *also* existed without his constant awareness of them, possibly in another time, emerging or disappearing. Ruggiero might be, for example, a role-model that the 21st-century Handel identifies with from time to time, or a person *he* believes he *was* in a former life, but has only intuitive contact with or day-dreams about. Whether they are the same person--or whether *any* of the Handel-like characters are *in fact* Handel--is not important; what is important is that they create a cloud of witnesses who bring Handel to us. A portrayal of this kind--multiple, non-linear, figurative, one where small fragments remind one of caricature--breaks with the tradition of linear time, and disrupts the idea of a truly cohesive character in the realistic sense. This means that a comprehensive list of a character's traits and inclinations is not conceivable, nor even desirable. We cannot tie a bow around him/her and reliably define or predict his/her character. S/he might well surprise her/himself, s/he becomes open-ended and to a degree chaotic, in contrast to the more "realistic" character.

Jordan, in *Saving the Cherry*, perceives that he has more than one self, and sets out to find others: "I resolved to set a watch on myself like a jealous father, trying to catch myself disappearing through a door just noticed in the wall" (10, 80). "Every journey

conceals another journey within its lines: the path not taken and forgotten angle. These journeys I wish to record" (9-10). One of the places the hidden self can be found is in others. The secret self is sometimes unwittingly found in the conscious process of looking for someone else. The known self is the familiar form: the other is the supposed unknown. Jordan explains his past loves:

I had in the past entangled myself in numerous affairs with women who would not, could not or did not love me. And did I love them? I thought so at the time, though now I have come to doubt it, seeing only that I loved myself through them. . . . I may be cynical when I say that very rarely is the beloved more than a shaping spirit for the lover's dreams. (74)

While Jordan searches for Fortunata he is not sure whether she is someone else, or a part of himself: "Was I searching for a dancer whose name I did not know or was I searching for the dancing part of myself?" (40). It is when "life itself [is] already worn out" that we seek out others to disrupt our shape and push us toward something new (74). "Whilst looking for someone else you might come across yourself unexpectedly, in a garden somewhere or on a mountain watching the rain" (102), Jordan supposes. In the end, Jordan quite literally encounters himself when walking through London Fields during the fire of London, reaches out and finds his own face looking back at him. "Perhaps I am to die," he says, and then, while he is protesting this, "Or perhaps I am to live, to be complete" (143).

The anti-pollution activist in *Saving the Cherry* thinks about her multiple selves this way:

I have a calendar and a watch, and so rationally I can tell where I am in this thing called a year. My own experience is different. I feel as though I have been here for years already. I could be talked out of that but I couldn't be persuaded not to feel it any more. How do you persuade someone not to feel? And so my strongest instinct is to abandon the common-sense approach and accept what is actually happening to me; that time has slowed down. . . . If I have a spirit . . . It may inhabit numerous changing decaying bodies in the future and in the past.

(126)

Both the activist and Jordan confirm that the self is multiple and not single (90, 126), and that it is "the inward life" that tells them so. When the activist says "I am only looking for a theory to fit the facts" (126), she is referring to the inner experience of life (the facts), which will not conform to clock-time (the current theory). According to Jordan, there is a gap between that outward time that uses the watch and calendar, and that "other life, the secret life," which needs to be "found and brought home" in order for a person to live in peace (103).

Jordan understands that he has lost himself between "[his] own ideal of [him]self and [his] pounding heart" (101). In accounting for his journeys, Jordan explains:

I've kept the log book for the ship. Meticulously. And I've kept a book of my own, and for every journey we have made together I've written down my own journey and drawn my own map. I can't show this to the others, but I believe it to be a faithful account of what happened, at least, of what happened to me.

Are we all living like this? Two lives, the ideal outer life and the inner

imaginative life where we keep our secrets? (102)

Winterson's fictions repeatedly take up the theme of "word" versus "life," and the need for a reconciliation between the two. Once an awareness is planted that the relationship between life and our representations of it is itself artificial, and that secret lives exist around and about the ones we cherish in our minds, it is an easy temptation to dishonour the representative, the "word." Many of Winterson's characters work to acknowledge within themselves a symbiotic rather than confrontational relation between lived experience and representation--the "mental version" (*Art Objects* 26), to acknowledge the formative role of "the image." Every character has his/her own attachment to "the flying word." Sappho, of *Art & Lies*, is the character who moves from century to century most readily of any of Winterson's characters. Like the fragments that make up our "knowledge" of her, Sappho's life is portrayed as discontinuous and lyrical. Yet her love-affair with words is central to her life; she makes herself with her own chosen words, an image for itself. She begins the first section devoted to her in *Art & Lies* by naming herself: "I am a Sexualist . . . Say my name and you say sex." The voice is full of pose and extroverted show.

Sappho readily reinforces a spirit/body polarity:

Common for [people] to find that, as every material thing is slipping away, it is the image that prevails, the image that was victorious after all. Those pictures and impressions long since cut away from their source, but here still, as lively as ever, liveliness of spirit against the dying life. (135)

The world of metaphor, or "that which is carried above the literalness of life," is hers (137). She calls it "a way of thinking that avoids the problems of gravity. . . . The single word that can release me from all that unuttered weight" (137). And she explains that "it is so temporary, life, and the ideas that form it are spirit, not flesh, and the images that outlast it are spirit not flesh. The best of me is not my body . . ." (143). Her memories of love-making with Sophia are filled with images coloured red and "outline[s] told in blood" (143). But it is white roses, never red (67), that she carries from century to century. The moon, whiteness, bones, sand, and "white roses, never red," are Sappho's epithets (55-56, 61, 148-49, 193). The black bell of the clock and objective time (63) are in some degree her enemies: "Under the black bell, lie the bodies in single file, one behind the other. One hard on the heels of another, one by one, the fall, the clang, silence" (63).

Sappho is a consummate namer whose hope is "from the soul" and "for the soul. Not present, actual, superficial life, but the real solid world of images." She hopes "that the real solid world of images will prevail" (143). She *can* be "more" than words. When she describes her love with Sophia, body images prevail:

The sun on my spine brings colours to my eyes, blue and blood vermillion. My ribs are the ribs of rock that underpin the caramel soil. All this I am but there is more. Why split the soul from the body and then the soul from itself? (143)

As namer, Sappho speaks of words as written and readable on her body:

Love me Sophia, this hand tracing of myself, an outline told in blood. Take my hand, what do you read there? The chronicle of a long life and all the forgotten

loss. But what remains when the story has been told? What will bring you back to me when you know what happens next? Only the words, the curving beauty in flight, the lasso at once tough and airborne. The words for their own sake, revealing now, themselves. Words beyond information. Words done with plot. The illuminated manuscript that lights itself. (143-144)

Sappho's world cannot and will not deny death, but she holds on to that which survives it: memory, image, word, and hope. If this reinforces the polarity of body and spirit, the aim is to understand how they are mutually defining. Because the polarity is still with us, it must be seized and shaped: transformed with the hands. My impression is that Winterson moves closer to the sign, to form, for the sake, as Ermarth puts it, of correcting a balance:

Language depends on the joint function of symbolic [content] and semiotic [form] disposition, the joint operation of syntax and parataxis, the combined effect of rhythmic and thetic utterance. Achieving such balance in language is not a simple matter, to put it mildly, and in part the complexity proceeds from the fact that the achievement depends upon renouncing familiar mental habits. ("Conspicuous" 349)

At the end of *Art & Lies*, Handel suggests that,

everything that can exist does exist, as Plato would say, in pure form, but perhaps those forms with which we have become the most familiar now pass for what we call actual life. The world of everyday, experienced as a world of

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

The implication is that all is form, and it is our relationship with it that changes its status from what seems everyday to what is "secret" and must be sought out; the "invented" must be "come upon" (199). A picture of the world where the word is dead is a ghastly one, the one where we live, the dystopian world of the 21st century (*Art & Lies* 64-65). To avoid this world, Sappho uses language and invents forms. Her relationship to "the word" is not only abstract: "I cannot eat my words but I do. I eat the substance, bread, and I take it into me, word and substance, substance and word, daily communion, blessed" (55). Sappho's ingestion of language makes her reality fluid. Where Jordan finds a door in a wall through which to escape from his London existence, Sappho fashions her freedom from the images of sand, sea, and moon that lend her reality a placticity and allow her to transform herself. Like Picasso's, Sappho's geography of self becomes "fluid" (93). The "deception of sand and sea" are her love (52, 55). Alchemy and transformation are opposed to technology: ". . . ignorant of alchemy they put their faith in technology and turned the whole world to gold. The dead sand shone." Her greatest desire is "to shift the seeming-solid world" (55).

The process of mutual transformation between "the world of images," "art," "words," and the body is continual. Sappho explains the symbiosis: "To match the silent eloquence of the created world I have learned to speak." "Language, that describes it,

becomes me," she tells us (138). "Art," says Sappho, never "depicts [life] as we think it is, nor expresses it as we hope it is, and yet *becomes it*. Not representations, but inventions that bear in themselves the central forces of the world" (my italics; 137-38). It is our attachment to the world of image and representation that must change, must involve invention of new forms, and take us out of "the bath of self-regard" (139).

3.3 *A New Narrative for Handel*

The narrative techniques required to put across the possibilities that Jordan and Sappho, Handel and Picasso live, by necessity *play* with more linear realistic narration, altering it just enough to question such basic principles as continuous time, empirical reality, and coherent identity. In the next section I will look closely at the very beginning of *Art & Lies* to see how we are introduced to Handel.

The first section of the novel is devoted to Handel and says so on the chapter title page. But unlike a realistic novel which might start at the character's birth, or somehow give an account of the "beginning" of that character's experience as it pertains to what will follow, Winterson's work begins with an image of a train given in the present tense: two short paragraphs, at the end of which we are introduced to "the man". The use of a definite article, there having been no prior reference to the man, connotes that the narrator knew the man before this moment, but the reader still doesn't know if this man is Handel. One wonders who is speaking. We are not introduced in any way to the voice that speaks. The images of this first section come to us as it were from nowhere, detached, like an unidentified voice-over. The focalization at the start of the

first short paragraph is outside the train at a particular point beside the track, watching the train approach (let us call this point "A"): ". . . from a distance only the light is visible, a speeding gleaming horizontal angel . . . " The second and third sentences of the first paragraph are seen from a closer vantage point, perhaps as the train approaches point A. The narrator tells us that a "note bells," but we are not sure if this is, as Genette would say, an *iterative* event (i.e., that this is something one should expect from a train, that this is bound to happen on this route, that this is part of what a commuter train does), or if a one-time occurrence is described. The last sentence of the short paragraph confirms the iterative nature of the previous two, by introducing another iterative event, the doors, which, "open and close, open and close, in commuter rhythm." The focalization for iterative descriptions immediately becomes more abstract. This narrative consciousness has seen and heard this train every day, or presumes its regularity. Because of the iterative section, the whole description of the train now takes on the sense of routine, especially with the words "commuter rhythm." The narrator is able to fit this scene into a whole societal context.

In the second paragraph we move inside the train, we see people and stones. The "rough-cut stones that remain unpolished" are perhaps those of the railroad embankment. In the second sentence we find "the man" and the extraordinary event happening to him of which he is unaware because he "is busy." The focalization of this description is more particular still, perhaps that of someone sitting across the aisle from him. And finally, what seems an enigmatic statement at first: "His book is a plate of glass". The narrator is perhaps referring to a window the man is looking through, rather

than a book. If so, what is the narrator implying by calling a window a book? What is the difference between a window (overlooking what?), and a book (on what?)? If light is "burning his clothes," etc., is another train coming to meet them on the same track, or is it the sun shining through the pane? Is the narrator enthusiastically describing the sun or some other, more mysterious, light? Is the man busy "reading" what he sees outside the window? He has turned from his book to the sun outside the window.

This small and uncomplicated beginning generates complex interpretive activity in the reading process. One of the most obvious devices is the use of the present tense. While Elizabeth Ermarth claims that "the loss of the past tense means the loss of the future and, therefore, the loss of that continuity of time in which causal sequences can unfold their meanings," the iterative sentences in this passage give it a feeling of familiar distance if not of the past. It is at the point where the focalization moves to "the man," that a non-iterative section begins. "The man is busy," and suddenly the iterative mood disappears and the "controlling viewpoint" is set in motion (Ermarth, *Realism* 51), and past and future fall away, breaking down familiarity. It is here too that the most figurative language is used. In fact, as we move closer and closer to the man in these two paragraphs, the sense of continuity in time decreases. The final statement, "His book is a plate of glass," immediately sets a figurative and "subjective" tone to the description. We have moved from what seems an objective narration to the most subjective of positions.

What Ermarth observes as objective and linear portrayal of character in realistic narrative then, is broken down first by the continual movement of the focalization from

non-specified, to iterative, to particular narrative positions. The foundation which allows the multifaceted particulars detailed in realistic narrative to be drawn together rests on the assumption of a consistent narrative position which views objectively. The more that voice is questioned--or the more it becomes inconsistent--the less we are sure of understanding the identity of characters as coherent and singular.

I will remark on two aspects of what we have observed in these first few paragraphs. Some things strike a note of familiarity with what is described, and some impose a distance. The focalization at point A keeps the perspective outside the train, perhaps of someone watching the train pass. The train "pulls the light in a long gold thread." This phrase too brings to mind time-lapse night-time photographs of moving vehicles, geometric lines, and certainly distance from the train. The iterative section, while it connotes a social familiarity, also suggests a temporal viewpoint *after* the event. And while the definite article used with "man" gives the impression that the narrator knows the man described, the narrator cannot know him *well*, or s/he would have used his name. The narrator speaks like an investigator watching a suspect; there is an intimacy in the details observed, but a lack of familiarity with the man; the eye is that of a voyeur.

On the other hand, the present tense used--iterative or not--brings the train immediately to view, as in a film, before we have any sense of an implied spectator or narrator of the film. Present-tense narration in this sense is like having a personal guide for an event that is currently happening; it is so immediate that the guide seems to disappear. "From a distance only the light is visible" certainly connotes a narrator

much more distinctly than would past-tense narration. The iterative atmosphere, as mentioned already, brings us into a culture, and therefore makes the whole passage and commuter culture familiar. And, finally, the definite article connotes a sort of familiarity with the man, on the part of the narrator; he is not simply *any* man.

The principal drama of this tension is set up (for this reader) between the culture of commuters and the extraordinary experience of light happening both to the train itself and to the man. The beauty of the train seen from afar is not usually associated with the boredom of commuter lifestyle. We can say that while a distance is established through the objective view of the train in the first paragraph, the observation is an admiring one rarely made during the long ride to work and the long ride home. The train takes on angelic qualities. The sunshine is a burning, zealous energy. Is this what happens every day, but goes unnoticed? Is there something special about today? about the book the man is looking at--the plate of glass? Or is it the narrator him/herself who has a mythic quality? The effect is to bring the extraordinary, the fantastic, or even the divine (angels and biblical zeal bring this to mind) into a very ordinary scene. The reader is now set up for an extraordinary narration. This narrator could be the sunlight itself, or a spiritual presence in the train. The train is no longer ordinary; a mythical presence has entered it and used it as an example of a miracle.

This mythical tone (as much as anything else) destroys the illusion of what we usually think of as "reality," by destroying the plausible commuter scene. The juxtaposition of the divine and the ordinary pulls us into the intensity of "light pouring down his shoulders" and away from a narrative that presents a believable reality, or that

sits at the end of events, finding a consensus of views. Many readings are possible, among which is the view that in fact we *are* looking at an "objectively" real scene, but that the narrator is "unreliable" (even crazy). I am inclined to read this passage as a picture of a reality seen through the eyes of someone who sees with the eyes of poetic vision. This is not the view of someone who is "confused" about reality. One is cajoled into seeing the extraordinary in the familiar, which as a consequence is no longer the familiar "reality" one may have thought it to be. In reading this passage, this reader is inclined to discard the notion of "reality" in an objective sense, and to allow the fantastic, the possibly allegorical, to infiltrate and transform the commuter reality. The passage moves easily between reality and fantasy, and in doing so seems to pertain to both, and to disrupt the idea of either.

This section, which begins *Art & Lies*, violates several of Ermarth's requirements for plausible realistic narrative and for the portrayal of realistic identity, most evident of which is the presentation of the extraordinary. The creation of a consensus precludes the presentation of miraculous events, the visionary, or the marginalized; it demands empirical observation. In a realistic narrative, we believe we are presented with a story of something that "might have happened." When the events presented become incredible--given cultural assumptions of what "normal" reality is--two contrary directions can be taken by the reader. Either we believe the narrator to be unreliable (something "else" happened and this is a bad report), or we decide to let "reality" have other parameters (this is a good report of something real, seen by an expanded consciousness). While the "reality" of Sappho's existence in the 21st century is

questionable in Western culture now, perhaps it will not be by the 22nd century.

The tension between commuter reality and miraculous vision is the tension, in a sense of the whole of *Art & Lies*. That death-in-life reality of the commuter man in Handel, is transformed by the depth of memory and imagination, love and the possibility that he takes with him on this trip from London. We have seen how the break-down of temporal linearity disturbs the justification for a text's "veracity" through association with the reader's life. We have looked at how this in turn problematizes the basic consensus and coordinating systems of an ontology that underpins universal reality and singular, progressive identities.

Handel emerges in this world a man who must allow a great deal more to influence him and who must admit into his life an almost infinite possibility for connection and communication. He must find compassion for the parrot, for the boy who deserted the Cardinal and the red-haired lover, for the "callous doc", the patriarchal cleric inside him. In short, he must go beyond the commuter reality of the train that his present life rides in and break out into a world of accidents, risk, and the visionary. The hope presented in this novel rests in its compassion for its characters. It is not too late for Handel.

4 Conclusion

In Winterson's narrative, where "reality" itself is part fiction, one of three things generally happens. (1) We become completely immersed in the present situation, because the narrator has no sense of a future position from which a realistic story is narrated. Sometimes this loss of perspective is caused by the characters' shifting constantly from century to century or from memory to dream with the result that we are presented with a sometimes figurative, montage-like impression rather than a linear narrative of their lives. Sappho's story in *Art & Lies*, for example, takes on this quality. (2) Because we cannot depend on an "objective narrator," the solid grip on an "objective reality" loosens, and linear time and any cosmological order become diffuse, or fragmented. There is no comprehensive sense of the objective world as a complete and integral fact, or of a consciousness that controls it. Meaning can therefore be derived not simply from the text's referential quality--from its reflection of a believable world--but can also be created in *any* process of meaning-making, from typological Platonism, to the immediacy of a single mind and the unresolved moment. The place and time from which the story is narrated become increasingly unclear, and perhaps irrelevant. Several time-lines could exist, and they depend on the individual reading, rather than on the consensus of realistic narrative. The result is that while sometimes a narrative time existing beyond the confines of the present events of the novel is conceivable, we are aware as readers that all "times" (those of reading, of the events of the novel, of writing the novel, or of the narrator telling the story, for example) are to some degree "imaginal."¹² (3) The devices the author uses become self-evident; it seems the writer

herself is speaking, even showing off her narrative wares. Critics of Winterson have called her narcissistic. There *is* something annoying about someone saying "watch me talk", or "Listen, I'm telling you stories". On the other hand, I'd rather s/he showed *any* form of reflexivity rather than hide behind an impenetrable ideological aris called "narrator."

First of all, then, Winterson's narrator/characters have intense internal lives; we are brought into them, and into their questionings about truth and conjecture. In both *Sexing the Cherry* and *Art & Lies* the characters live in a dynamic dance in which "reality" is characterized by "empty space and points of light." The characters, "as well as understanding time as we *normally* understand it . . . may experience time as a larger, all-encompassing dimension and so be in touch with much more than the present" (*Sexing* 91; my emphasis). The moments of concrete particularity are highly valued in Winterson's fiction. In *Written on the Body*, meaning, as it were, grows out of memories engraved on the narrator's physical body; it is an analysis of the those memories and the narrator's relationship to them that form the principal journey of the book. The "particulars" of characters' lives in Winterson's work are the infinitely valuable root and ground from which their questioning of the nature of "reality" grows. In realistic narrative, the nature of "particularity" is not questioned; instead, the unproblematic "particulars"

remain mere concretia until, combined with other cases of a similar kind, they yield their abstraction: concretes are appreciated not in themselves but as tools

and as keys that unlock hidden secrets. . . . The values of realism--consensus, continuity, mobility, distance, infinity--are always careless of the concrete.

(Ermarth, *Realism* 78)

Winterson's narrative at times makes use of temporal narrative positions such as Genette's *subsequent*, *prior*, *simultaneous*, and *interpolated* narrating. Her characters at times carry on their affairs in an objectively real world where such temporal relationships make sense. Much of Winterson's work could be interpreted as interpolated narrative, "a narrating with several instances", in which, "the story and the narrating can become entangled in such a way that the latter has an effect on the former" (Genette 217).

In the light of Genette's categories, however, how could the following comment by Jordan in *Saving the Cherry* be read?

The scene I have just described to you may lie in the future or the present. 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)

There is undoubtedly a moment of narrating in this statement, but its temporal relation to events described is directly called into question by the narrator. I have chosen an instance of particular temporal questioning in the novel; nevertheless, it is quite typical of the general attitude toward temporal narrative positioning in Winterson's narrative.

Some of the most powerful sections of Winterson's work for this reader are

moments entirely within the mind and emotions of a character. The narrator of *Written on the Body* is drenched in his/her memories of his/her lover, Louise, and we encounter poetic sections on parts of the body and the narrator's experience of sharing those parts of his/her body and Louise's body. We are brought into the evocative world of these memories from a temporal position we are already familiar with, when the narrator has escaped Louise's death to the north of England. So much of him/her is now inscribed with Louise's life, so much is defined in relation to her, that the idea of a future without her rips those places to shreds and leaves chaos behind. The memories are not of a past time only; they have been written on the narrator's body and s/he experiences them *now*, and legitimates memory as a bodily embedded torment and richness. While there is every reason to talk of loss, the poignant memory is seen as an important and powerfully present experience of life. The question of the future is contained in these moments; s/he never seriously contemplates suicide. There is a past and a present and a future involved in the narration of these sections that are all held in the suspense that the character him/herself is in, waiting for the prognosis of Louise's leukemia.

Winterson's treatment of that quality of memory to be seemingly engraved on the body brings into the reader's mind the inner life of a character very powerfully, so powerfully in fact that we are never sure which is memory, what is inner life, and what is "objectively real." And this confusion is not resolved for us, because all are seen as equally important, equally "real." Gérard Genette--with his talent for conceiving of exceptions to rules--describes a section of *À la recherche du temps perdu* which bears resemblance to Winterson's descriptions of the experience of intense memory. He

describes a section of Proust's writing in which both *telling* and *showing* seem to merge. The narrative voice is immanent, and also allows a very close immediacy to the situation described. It is particularly a section in which a narrator describes a memory.

[W]hat we are dealing with is not the story, but the story's 'image,' its *trace* in a memory. But this trace, so delayed, so remote, so indirect, is also the presence itself. In this *mediated intensity* is a paradox which, quite obviously, is such only according to the norms of mimetic theory: a decisive transgression, a rejection pure and simple--as we watch--of the millennial opposition between *diegesis* and *mimesis*. (168)

Winterson's narrators are not about the business of maintaining "a proper distance" which "enable[s] the subjective spectator or the subjective consciousness to see the multiple viewpoints and so to find the form of the whole in what looks from a closer vantage point like a discontinuous array of specific cases" (Ermarth, *Realism* 35). Within the objective "reality" of realistic fiction, the connective tissue of consensus is formed in order to present a world out of material which, despite its contradictions, makes sense in the greater scheme of things. In Winterson's fiction the particular views of characters do not necessarily fit into any "form of the whole"; particular vignettes are often not referred to again, and contribute simply to a cloud of images that surround the text. There is little effort to find a "balance between private and public life," no effort to "legitimize" the personal by placing it within an acceptable social framework. And none of this is seen to be problematic. There is less of an expectation of unity or wholeness.

While Winterson's work touches on irreconcilable differences, she does not hesitate to allow unexpected and serendipitous reunions. Meanwhile,

the realistic novelist actually seeks to emphasize and even to exaggerate differences, ironies, paradoxes, since without these painful gaps and troublesome disparities there would be no need for the embracing abstraction. . . . Differences are always concordable in realism, the doubleness of character and ambiguity of events consistently hold out the promise of recovery and fruitful resolution.

(Ermarth 51)

Though gaps and disparities occur in Winterson's fiction, they do not present themselves as painful or troublesome. Connections happen due to the combined effort of particular characters and the unique vagaries of circumstance. In *Saving the Cherry*, the 17th-century John Tradescant (in one of his thoughtful moods perhaps) is transported to a 20th-century Admiralty salvage tug close to the mouth of the Thames. Sappho's imaginative mind brings her to the 21st-century where she is able to save Picasso's life in *Art & Lies*. There are moments of magical connection between characters, and there are moments when characters live unconnected, individual lives. The question of whether these moments themselves are interconnected, or resolve to fit into any larger organizing principle within the fictional world, is simply not dealt with.

An effect of this constant change of voices is that the reader becomes acutely aware of the writer's hand in manipulating these different sections. Consensus, while it begins to cohere in some longer past-tense sections, is suddenly broken as an entirely other character and scene take over. Earlier sections may be taken up again, but they

are soon abandoned. Again, Winterson has said, "I really don't 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" (*Oranges* xiii). To the degree that s/he can take a step backward, and find that the narrative agent comes into view (see Ermarth, *Realism* 68-71) the reader becomes an observer of the technical production of the novel. This occurs in the same way in which any person becomes an observer who watches the machinations of her/his own mind and emotions from a vantage point becomes the observer of her/his own powers of manipulation. In gaining a larger perspective in this way, the reader can watch as one narrator is replaced by another. The effect is similar to that of a child removing one toy soldier, saying, "I don't like him!", and putting another in its place as if to say, "there, that's better!". As with the child, one's attention is drawn from the story (for example, the toy soldiers' exploits), to the child at play--although this is not intended in any way to demean the effort, because, as Winterson achieves this effect, she also overthrows a dictatorial consensus. The broken consensus points to the deviousness of the realistic narrator's methods. In effect, the potential of realistic narrative to provide an ostensibly "accurate," supposed "self"-portrait of mainstream society, itself perpetuates that society by buttressing the biases of the reader. In drawing attention to narrative devices by changing them every few paragraphs, Winterson declares her own biases and then points to them, saying, "see how this is artifice, not all real?." It also frees her to present more marginalized characters, to mingle the ordinary with the fantastic: in effect, to work at inventing her own forms of narration. The reader is warned that this book will not be "normal." Unfortunately,

some readers will put the book down in the bookstore and look for something "less weird." It is a frightening challenge to the reader to ask him/her slowly to relax his or her expectations and to jump into action with the writer. Winterson's work is an example of what Ermarth calls "postmodern narrative," which "emphasises the power of invention and fabrication to the point, as Robbe-Grillet says, of making it the foundation of discourse, the subject of the book" (*Sequel* 7).

When the writer drops the role of the instructing higher mind, s/he assumes the freedom to take on any voice s/he likes. Winterson's narrators are not objective.¹⁴ There is no longer the pretence of the reader "having been endowed for a time with the keen perception and the impetuous emotions of a nobler and more penetrating intelligence" (Ruskin, quoted in Belsey 8). When a writer has no reason to make a "nobody" of her narrator, or to mask her consensus-gathering function, there is no reason the writer herself cannot emerge in whatever voice she chooses, whether it be a narrator's or her own, nor is there any way to be absolutely sure which is which. The invisible fourth wall is torn down and the writer's identity merges with her narrator's. The writer's own voice mingles quite happily with all the other voices present in any one reading of a text. The writing is, of course, autobiographical, and, of course, it is not.

In an interview with the *Voice Literary Supplement*, Jeanette Winterson declared that she "think[s] all writers are moralists . . . Anybody who wishes to announce himself [sic] as an artist in any way must be prepared to challenge what is already given" (Anshaw 18). She does not deny her position as a moralist in her own right, but her work leaves all kinds of room for the reader to make his/her own conclusions. Unlike

the reader of a realistic novel, who more or less automatically follows the narrative consciousness because it already plays such a rallying role, the reader of Winterson's work is not likely to gallop ahead with the plot, but can float above events *or* become deeply involved. Winterson leaves "enough space for people to think it through," believing it "very wrong to write in any way that leaves no room for the reader to manoeuvre" (*Contemporary Literary Criticism*, 440). Winterson is opinionated, but does not drag us along in an ostensibly transparent consensus. Because we have already taken that step back and can see her manoeuvring, it is our option to stand back and find her "amusing," or "annoying," or to jump into the fray in whichever guise we choose. Disrupting realistic narrative convention as she does is a way of halting its supposedly unwitting ideological brainwashing, while still allowing the writer her own moral position. Surprisingly, this does not mean the reader must agree; in fact, far from becoming more heavy-handed, by keeping bias out in the open, the reader's judgement and participation remain intact, even encouraged. The effect is much like that of listening to another person's interpretation of the world for a moment, and then deciding what one thinks of it.

Winterson's voice seems to mingle with the narrators', and small details of her life creep into the mix. The narrator of *Written on the Body* names his/her foundling cat "Hopeful", and Winterson has named one of her own "Hopeful." Winterson's idiosyncratic dislike of central heating (*Art Objects* 162) creeps into *Art & Lies*: when Picasso escapes, leaving her family home rather worse-for-wear, the central heating fails (48). Louise, of *Written on the Body*, refuses to install central heating in her home, but

once she moves out, the hateful Elgin has it installed (63, 170). These are simply small personal details that drift into Winterson's fiction like motes. And it is impossible, except in this most perfunctory way, to extricate these motes from the "fictional" material, or to separate life from representation. Winterson makes no effort to hide her personal whims. To be sure, there are times when I, as one reader, have questioned Winterson's claim that she wants to "leave room for the reader." Her instructive comments do "come on strong" at times, but, given her manipulation of narrative devices, we are discouraged from seeing these comments as necessary truths, and encouraged to form our own opinions of her aphorisms.

In structural terms, a writer and a narrator *do not* tell their stories from the same temporal narrative position; however, a writer does create a narrator to tell a story that originated somewhere in the writer's experience and imagination. In this sense, the narrator is part of the writer, and the writer, to some degree at least, becomes the narrator. The "reality" is not simply that of a fictional narrator. To use Eriq La Salle's term, one could say that the writer "enacts" with every narrator a distinct interpretative process. Winterson's continuous exchange of "enactors"/narrators/interpreters plays out the constantly changing relationship any one person has with the world and the continuous influence and transformative power physical and social context have on the individual, and vice versa. This is the process Paul Smith describes, which, for each subject/individual, provides a "specific twist in the dialectic between individuation and ideological interpellation" (25).

As we have seen, one of the underlying questions of Winterson's narrative is

"who is the creator of reality?." The Narrator? the Writer? the Reader? This question pertains not only to the fictional world, but also to the complex relation between fiction ("... that becomes us") and the readers' and writer's lives. Introducing the chapter on "Voice" in *Narrative Discourse*, Genette complains of interpretive blunders on the part of critics, who

identify the narrating instance with the instance of "writing," the narrator with the author, and the recipient of the narrative with the reader of the work: a confusion that is perhaps legitimate in the case of a historical narrative or a real autobiography, but not when we are dealing with a narrative of fiction, where the role of narrator is itself fictive, even if assumed directly by the author, and where the supposed narrating situation can be very different from the act of writing (or of dictating) which refers to it. (213-14)

There can be no question that much of the time, Winterson's characters express their own stories. In those instances, a traditional narrator functions with a focalization of the fictional character. The narrative instance in these cases is a fictional one, and pertains to a possible time-line associated with that character. However, when Winterson was asked if *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* is autobiographical, she replied, "No not at all and yes of course" (*Oranges* xiv). Sappho, of *Art & Lies*, problematizes Genettean distinctions when she says that "there is no such thing as autobiography, there's only art and lies." Winterson herself calls conventional boundaries between fiction and fact "nonsense," in the light of a writer's style, which

frees the writer from the weight of her own personality, gives to her an

incandescence of personality, so that what she can express is more than, other than, what she is. Through the development of style imagination is allowed full play. The writer is not restricted to what she has experienced or to what she knows, she is let loose outside of her own dimensions. This is why art can speak to so many different kinds of people regardless of time and place. It is why it is so foolish to try to reconstruct the writer from the work. (*Art Objects* 187)

The distinction that Genette makes between fictive points of narration and those of "historical narration, or real autobiography" do not clearly apply in the light of these beliefs. Winterson admits, in her statements, that Jeanette from *Oranges* is both Jeanette Winterson and an "invention." Winterson is also saying that she is not sure when or to what degree she herself--even at the moment of speaking--is an "invention." What we talk about as "real life" is--to a great degree--the result of representation, or interpretation, and what we talk about as "fiction" is part of "real" lived experience.

In a fictional world where "reality" is in a constant interpretive dance with itself and is quite comfortable with that dance, there is an irony created within the writer/viewer him/herself by a constant movement between the apparent "exterior" and "interior" worlds and by the transformative process that results from that movement. The actor is also the observer, and ready to see his/her actions in a critical light. J. Hillis Miller, in his *The Form of Victorian Fiction* explains how the presence of both character's and narrator's voices at once is "continuously and necessarily ironical, however mild or attenuated this irony may be" (3). It is this same irony, existing in the writer's own experience of life, that is expressed in less realistic narratives. This irony is caused by a

consciousness that has some grasp of its own culturally determined nature, its own lack of control, and yet is also hopeful about its positive ability to affect itself. Winterson is enacting lives that are "multiple, not single", lives that are "stacked together like plates on a waiter's hand. Only the top is showing, but the rest are there and by mistake we discover them" (*Sexing the Cherry* 90-91). What cannot be discerned, especially in Winterson's fiction, is the fine line separating writer and work, character and writer. This results not so much in a distinct "voice of the writer" entering, as in a breakdown of what usually distinguishes narrator from writer. To problematize matters further, we have no proof that the material of fiction, or of dreams, does not, at least in part, originate *outside* the single consciousness.¹¹ We assume that a writer wrote the fiction we read; the person *we think of* as the writer would certainly be an "implied author." S/he is also the writer him/herself, outside any one person's mind.

By drawing on every possible voice--including her own--in her montage, Winterson legitimizes them all as the various ways we have of deciding what is "art" and what is "lies." It is clear also that once the reader becomes aware of the characters and of interacting with the writer by reading fiction, those very characters merge with schema within the reader's memory as though they were part of a dream, and may from there contribute to the reader's identification of him/herself and others. In this very individual process of taking in any one writer's particular style, the reader participates in the definition of both writer and him/herself. The question of whether the writer is "implied" seems to me a matter of politeness in a world that pretends control over who influences whom.

The question is not so much "who" is speaking, but, once different voices are distinguished in a given text, how has the writer sought to reconnect them and what is suggested by particular kinds of connection? It is the connective tissue of consensus holding the lot together that characterizes realistic fiction. That "connective tissue" in realism is perforce the narrative consciousness, speaking from a temporal position, as Genette puts it, "subsequent to what it tells" (216). The connections in realistic fiction are made by the past-tense narrator and by the assumptions of objective reality that are inherent in subsequent narration. Winterson opposes these past-tense narrator/author/character/reader oppositions by the multiple aspects and multiple temporal references of her narrative positions. The self-conscious and self-evident agent which pulls the "aspects" or "particular" memories together is the writer herself, moved by and moving the narrative voices that emerge in her creative process.

The *raison d'être* of the post-realist novel is to enact the always symbiotic relationship between our experience and the name with which we grasp it. The nature of our experience has changed since days when "objective reality" was a given, and empirical science was new. In *Middlemarch*, Lydgate has ambitions to take up after Bichet in an empirical study of the "nature of materials" (177). Mary Anne Evans was born into that same rational and commonsense world; in her fiction she fought against fantasy and for a view of life "as it is" for the working class. While the straight-as-an-arrow story is no longer truly ours, it is the heritage against which and with which we invent new forms of writing and being. In the 1990s, a vocally plural and self-conscious narrative is emerging as the more democratic mode.

Endnotes

¹ The terms "reflexive" and "reflexivity" or "reflexiveness" originate in the fields of mathematics and linguistics. Both Bertrand Russell and G. Frege used the term "reflexivity". After the initial development of structural linguistics by Ferdinand de Saussure, the word was first applied at the syntagmatic (full sentence) level by Émile Benveniste and was independently adopted by social science and textual criticism. In ethnomethodological sociology, John Johnson uses the term to "refer to the mutual interdependence of observer or knower to what is seen or known" (Douglas & Johnson 172). In his work on the metaphor-metonymy axis in linguistics, Roman Jakobson expanded the referential-reflexive notion further:

By expanding the meaning of metaphor and metonym to include all linguistic, indeed all symbolic, functioning, Jacobsen asserted that the process of contiguity and similarity, which traditional rhetoric and poetics had long recognised at work in these figures of speech, form the basis not only of literary styles, but also of all language and thought . . . (Makaryk 590)

The word is used in reader-response criticism to discuss creative elements in the process of reading. See for examples, see Dällenbach, and Nelson. Lowry Nelson Jr. defines textual reflexivity as that quality of a work "to comment on itself", one where "the fictive role of the reader and the self-reflexiveness of the work have in common a playing with the reality of the fiction" (175). He describes Dante's *Paradiso* as reflexive: "a poem about the writing of itself" (187). The writer, in Nelson's analysis, is both,

"contriver" and "communicator" while the reader is both dupe--"believer"--and "agnostic" (190). Lucien Dällenbach uses the term "reflexive" in reference to texts containing "*mises en abyme* . . . which function as mirrors or microcosms of the text," and associates the term with, "Mallarmé, Proust, and the *Nouveau Roman*" (435).

² This is not to disparage the democratic effort on the part of Eliot and other 19th century realists to provide an account of the suffering that pervades all industrialized society, but to say we have now moved away from realistic practice, and to question why.

³ For Ermarth's discussion of realism in painting, see *Realism* 16-20.

⁴ For a study of the order of events in a story versus the order in which they are narrated, see Gérard Genette's chapter on "Order" in his *Narrative Discourse*.

⁵ George Levine provides an extended discussion of the Victorian world as "organism" and as "mechanism" in *The Realistic Imagination* 267-74.

⁶ The impulse of realistic fiction continually to find a link between self and society has been noted by several commentators. George Levine, investigating the writing of George Henry Lewes and George Eliot, explains that Lewes saw the self not as a singular, unified and self-determining object, but "only as a set of relations . . . a sum of qualities forever in process" (Levine 267). Lewes, one of the founders of modern sociology, was less inclined to oppose self and other, and tended to see the growth of the one from the other. This does not, however, in Levine's view, put in question the basic assumption that George Eliot and G.H. Lewes were "empiricists and materialists" (263) and would not have been willing to shatter the unquestionable solidity of an "objective"

reality.

⁷ See *Art & Lies* 29, 53, 58, 129, 131.

⁸ In the new testament Gospel of John, chapter 5, a very sick man waits by a pool, which is reputed to have healing powers. The ill wait around the pool for it to stir, and when it does they must lower themselves in to be healed. The man asks Jesus of Nazareth to allow him strength to get to the pool before the water settles again.

⁹ I must thank my friends, the philologists Carolyn Jones and Dorota Dutsch, who took up this research with some enthusiasm. The following translation is theirs. I've used square brackets to indicate words I have added to make the text easier to read, or to indicate possible connotations of the original.

Indeed, the renown of that Egyptian library, the most lavish and certainly something to be numbered among the wonders of the world, [was] carried across the sea by sails and [trade] winds. [The sailors of these ships reported] nothing, however, about the rare and priceless volumes,* about the [fragments of written material] broken and tossed about; [nothing] about the Egyptian magical and occult writings, for which no doubt the sailors might have expected recompense of our eagerness; but rather [they reported] news that the courtyard was magnificent and huge, the ceilings towering and level with the floor of the gods [i.e., of heaven], so that the gods themselves could go about their business there as if in their own colonnade or solarium;† [the sailors also reported] that in the building itself, up to the ceiling, bookcases were built that contained all disciplines, but that not into the hands of students did such things come because

of their height. For [the sailors] marvelled that the height was so great that no one, whether by ladders or mechanical devices, could climb up, had it not been for the innumerable horde of boys, whose legs were more slender than threads [and] whose spirits, like smoke, mingled in the air--like our Maus--and through whom, finally, many things had to be handed down but nothing could be [held/handed] back. For those boys were gathered together around the library on boards rising ever higher, and by a certain secret method all their own could exchange among themselves the orders, and within as short a space of time as one day send down any book you like.

* It was pointed out to me that the "books" at Alexandria would have been scrolls and tablets, not bound volumes as we know them.

† My classicist friends explained to me that the heaven of ancient Greece was known to have a floor so far above us in the sky that we cannot see it; it is above that floor that the gods go about their affairs. The word *zusto* (from the Greek *ξυστο*), for "colonnade," does not appear until some years after Pliny.

¹⁰ The narrator admits fear of the love s/he is experiencing. See pages 18-19 and 76.

¹¹ One might assume, for example, that as the concept of identity fragments, the possibility for connection, communication, and human relationships would disintegrate. However, what Winterson creates is a world where human relationships are in fact enhanced, there being more parts of the self to connect and less requirement that all parts be compatible.

¹² Henri Corbin, professor of Islamic Religion at the Sorbonne coined this term in trying to describe the 12th-century Persian Sufi's unusual experiences of another world; one no less real but "created by the imagination of many people" (Corbin 4).

¹³ In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne C. Booth outlines what he calls the general rules of "non-didactic fiction" (v) to be the following:

1. True Novels Must Be Realistic.
2. All Authors Should Be Objective.
3. True Art Ignores the Audience.

Under his fourth general rule, he catalogues the kinds of distance a reader ought to have from various kinds of texts, or, more indirectly, what kind of involvement is "forbidden" (124).

¹⁴ Contemporary physics suggests that this *is* indeed the case. See Ullman, in Hiley and Peat.

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