THE PASSION: JEANETTE WINTERSON'S UNCANNY MIRROR OF INK [1]

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Rosemary Jackson (1981) has defined fantasy fiction as corresponding to the first stage in Freud's evolutionary model, the magical animistic stage during which primitive man and the child alike have no sense of difference between "self" and "other." That is, a literature that works to dissolve structures, moving towards an ideal of entropic *undifferentiation,* "of transgression of the limits separating self from other, man from woman, human from animal, organic from inorganic objects" (Jackson 1981: 73).

But fantasy literature not only works towards undifferentiation, it simultaneously works towards the contrary pole of constant metamorphosis, with its stress upon instability of natural forms, expressive of its rejection of the notion of the self as a coherent, indivisible and continuous whole held by traditional 'realist' fiction. According to Rosemary Jackson (1981 : 83), "it is precisely this subversion of unities of 'self' which constitutes the most radical transgressive function of the fantastic."

The oxymoronic quality of the fantastic, with its simultaneous opposed pulls, on the one hand, towards instability and metamorphosis and, on the other, towards entropic undifferentiation, explains the appeal this literary mode has for the contemporary writers of the fringe (Jameson 1984) for, as a movement away from patriarchal totalitatianism, the new alternative culture is by definition heterogeneous, multilayered, unstable and contradictory.

Describing the position of the fantastic with respect to other literary modes, Jackson, following Todorov, situates it between "the opposite modes of the marvellous and the mimetic," explaining that "[t]he ways in which it operates can then be understood by its combination of elements of these two different modes" (Jackson 1981: 32).

Starting from the Freudian notion that the fantastic always develops around some kind of epistemological doubt,[2] Todorov (1973), drawing on Vladimir Solovyov, formulated his definition of the fantastic as a mode constantly hesitating between the poles of the credible and the incredible, the

real and the unreal: "[i]n the genuine fantastic, there is always the external and formal possibility of a simple explanation of phenomena, but at the same time this explanation is completely stripped of all internal probability." (Solovyov, in Jackson 1981: 27).

Epistemological uncertainty and equivocal truths are, then, the indispensable ingredients of "classic" fantasy literature. Now, looking at the writing practice of late-twentieth century "experimental" novelists, we find that they often combine in their work the self-referentiality characteristic of metafiction and the pleasure in the equivocal truths and epistemological hesitation characteristic of the fantastic, with a third element, an apparently contradictory realism-enhancing interest in history and in the traditional story-telling aspect of fiction. The paradoxical combination of self-referentiality, epistemological uncertainty and history that suffuses the work of an important number of contemporary writers in Britain and in the Western hemisphere as a whole reflects, as Linda Hutcheon (1988: 3) has pointed out, the basic contradictory nature of postmodernist art, which she describes as "a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts, the very concepts it challenges."

Linda Hutcheon has coined the phrase "historiographic metafiction" to describe this world-wide trend which, in England, can be traced back to the work of John Fowles and Lawrence Durrell, spreading in the seventies and eighties with novelists like Julian Barnes, Peter Ackroyd, Jim Crace, Charles Palliser, Angela Carter, Maureen Duffy and Jeanette Winterson.

In keeping with the heterogeneous and fragmentary nature of the postmodernist ethos, the novels written by these writers are very different in tone, range, scope and sensibility, some are overtly fantastic, others apparently more realistic; some more audaciously self-referential and formally intricate, others more conventionally linear and easy to read. Often, those written by socially well-established males tend to be more covertly subversive, while those written by feminists usually are subversive in a more obvious form, for, as J. A. García Landa recalls,

> The different social interests and conflicts at play within the same sign community are not only the interests of class. There are many other significant relationships (*power* relationships) at work. Differences in gender, sexual preference, race, ethnic group, religion, age, authority, political creed, scientific or other beliefs shading into individual attitude — all these may be a source of the accent which implements the ideological sign. (1991: 39)

We should bear García Landa's contention in mind in order to understand the true quality of the "accent" that suffuses Jeanette Winterson's work. Indeed, of the above-mentioned contemporary British writers, Jeanette Winterson is perhaps the one who best exemplifies the characteristics of the "fringe." Born in Lancashire, in a labouring-class family, in 1959, and brought up in a strict Pentecostal Evangelist faith, Winterson has led a quite unconventional life that qualifies her social, ideological, religious and sexual positions as in opposition to the mainstream of social patriarchy. As Nicci Gerrard (1989: 13) has explained, "at 12 she became a preacher . . . ; at 16 was found in bed with another woman and thrown out of her home and the Pentecostal Church," after which she tried several jobs "in an undertaker's parlour, selling ice-cream, and working in a mental hospital" before she went to Oxford to read English. She then tried a new job in advertising, eventually turning to writing after she "established that I'm unemployable" (in Gerrard 1989: 13).

Of the five novels so far written by Jeannette Winterson — *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* (1985), *Boating for Beginners* (1985), *The Passion* (1987), *Sexing the Cherry* (1988) and *Written on the Body* (1992) — her third and fourth novels may be described as fantastic "historiographic metafictions" in Linda Hutcheon's terms (1988), for they combine fantasy with a self-conscious relish in the story-telling aspect of fiction and with an apparently paradoxical interest in re-writing history: the Puritan revolution that brought about the death of Charles I and Cromwell's Commonwealth rule, in *Sexing the Cherry,* and Napoleon's imperialist wars, in the *Passion*.

Critics unanimously agree that *The Passion* is a landmark in the literary evolution of Jeanette Winterson. It culminates a tendency away from the autobiographical, realistically set comedy of her first novel and towards a much more overtly fantastic and lyrical kind of fiction. David Lodge (1988: 26) has aptly synthesised this evolution by saying that, where fantasy only "showed itself in the interpolated fairy tales of *Oranges* and the Monty Pythonesque surrealism of *Boating* [it] manifests itself as full-bloom magic realism [in *The Passion*]."

David Lodge further characterises the kind of "magic realism" he has in mind when he says that the increase of the fantasy element in *The Passion* is the result of the adoption by Jeanette Winterson of the Romantic tradition of storytelling as developed by Poe, Mary Shelley and Emily Brontë, a tradition which he contrasts with classical realism:

> whereas the realist tradition reflects back to us a familiar world subtly defamiliarised, and thus made more luminous or comprehen-sible or meaningful than it was before, the Romantic tradition deals with the unfamiliar, transgresses known limits, and transports the reader into new imaginative territory (Lodge 1988: 26)

According to David Lodge, the stylistic price the Romantic writer has to pay is the loss of "the ironical self-consciousness that saves a writer from bathos and pretentiousness" (1988: 26). Therefore, while considering *The Passion* "a remarkable advance in boldness and invention, compared to the previous novels" (1988: 26), he deplores its "high seriousness" and also the "intuitive, hit-or-miss . . . impatience to search for *le mot juste* or testing of every sentence, like Flaubert, or Joyce" (1988: 26). Analysing the style, Lodge finds, for example, that "[f]ragments of modern poetry, like the last line of T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of Alfred Prufrock, "are anachronistically put into the mouths of the characters with no discernible reason except to contribute a spurious touch of class to the discourse." (1988: 26).

We may agree with David Lodge when he says that the incorporation of fragments of poetry to the speech of concrete characters, or to the narrators' reports may have important stylistic consequences, and much more so, perhaps, in a novel whose stylistic richness has been compared to that of Virginia Woolf (Monmany 1989: 20), whose tone has been described as "rhythmic and seductive" (Gilbert 1988: 79), and whose "feel" has been likened to that of "a villanelle, an elaborate — and originally French — verse form in which words are repeated in a mesmerizing pattern." (Gilbert 1988: 79-80). A novel, in short, that stylistically aspires to that category of poetic prose T. S. Eliot attributed to St. John Perse's *Anabase*. Still, we may ask ourselves whether Jeanette Winterson's apparently haphazard appropriation of lines from various poems by T.S. Eliot is really only meant, as Lodge thinks, to give her novel a stylistic "touch of class," that is, whether there really is "no discernible reason" for Jeanette Winterson's "anachronistic" pastiche-ridden prose beyond a sheer Mannerism or whether, on the other hand, they form part of a well thought-out scheme with more than stylistic implications.

In order to answer this question we would have to attempt a thorough analysis of the novel, not only, as David Lodge proposes, horizontally, at a stylistic level, but also vertically, in depth, at the levels of fabula, story and text (Bal 1985) and even transtextually, that is, analysing *The Passion* not as

an isolated, singular text, but rather considering, in Genette's words, "everything that draws it into secret or overt relation to other texts."[3]

The Passion combines the stories of two narrator-characters: one is that of Henri, Napoleon's personal waiter and chicken cook, who simultaneously plays the roles not only of character and internal narrator but also of author and reader, for he is writing his memoirs/diary primarily for himself: "I re-read my notebook today . . . . I go on writing so that I will always have something to read" (*TP* 159). The other story is the retrospective account of a character-bound narrator, Villanelle, a Venetian boatsman's daughter with webbed feet and bi-sexual tendencies, who narrates the story of her life sometimes at first level, that is, addressing the reader directly, and sometimes as second-level narrator, addressing Henri and his friends.

Henri begins to narrate his life story in the first chapter, "The Emperor." This chapter goes from the moment when he volunteers as a recruit to join "the army of England at Boulogne" (*TP* 8), in 1797 (*TP* 86) and ends on New Year's Day, 1805, when he is twenty years old, but the chapter also includes a series of analepses recalling episodes of Henri's childhood and youth as well as episodes of his parents' lives, especially his mother's. The beginning of Villanelle's story, narrated in the second chapter, "The Queen of Spades," goes back to the moment when Bonaparte invaded Venice, also in 1797 (*TP* 52) but also includes a series of flashbacks recalling episodes of her parents' life and of her own birth and early years. Like "The Emperor," "The Queen of Spades" ends on "New Year's Day, 1805" (*TP* 76).

Chapter three, "The Zero Winter" alternates Henri's and Villanelle's narrations with Henri acting as first-level narrator, and Villanelle as second-level narrator, that is, at a certain moment, Henri hands over the narrative role to Villanelle, who starts narrating her life story to Henri and his two friends, Patrick and Domino. Henri's narration begins after he lost an eye at the battle of Austerlitz (*TP* 79), that is, after 2nd December 1805, and covers the Russian campaign and the desertion of Patrick, Henri and Villanelle, who return on foot from Russia to Venice. It ends in Venice after Henri murders Villanelle's husband on an unrecorded date, just before he is sent for life to "the madhouse on the island" (*TP* 140) of St Servelo, where we find him writing his diary.

The fourth chapter, "The Rock," again alternates Henri's and Villanelle's narrations, but now Villanelle's status as narrator is not subordinated to Henri's: as in "The Queen of Spades," she directly addresses the reader, and so enjoys perfect autonomy with respect to Henri's narration. Since they met in Russia their stories have merged, so in the fourth chapter their narrations

refer to the same events. In this sense we can say that the fourth chapter provides two parallel versions of their situation: one focalised from the perspective of Villanelle, the other from that of Henri.

At the beginning of the fourth chapter Henri has been in the St Servelo madhouse "I forget how many years" (*TP* 135), and is trying to break the spell cast by the ghosts of the past that daily visit him with their frightening voices, hollow eyes and even murderous hands (*TP* 142) by reading and adding to the war journal (*TP* 36) he keeps in a notebook (*TP* 159): the same journal he has been writing during the Napoleonic wars, and the same one we have been reading so far. When the chapter begins it is again near "Christmas and New Year" (*TP* 158) "more than twenty years since we went to church at Boulogne" (*TP* 160), that is, more than twenty years after 1789 and, we could add, after 1821, the date of Napoleon's death, for Henri refers to his death "in the mild damp" (*TP* 133) in retrospect. Although Villanelle's narration in this chapter is, like her previous ones, reported in the past, Henri now speaks in the present tense. So, in his narration story time and narrative time overlap in a present that projects itself into the future as the novel ends: "I will have red roses next year. A forest of red roses" (*TP* 160). In this sense, although Villanelle's narration in this chapter refers to the same events Henri describes and theoretically enjoys the same status as Henri's, it is psychologically contained within Henri's ending, for her account remains past with respect to Henri's and the reader's presents. This impression is further enhanced by the obvious fact that Henri's ending literally puts an end to the novel, as it is printed after hers.

Chronologically, Henri's and Villanelle's life stories follow parallel lines, as their lives were equally crucially conditioned by the same external event: the effects on them of the French Revolution and of Napoleon's imperialist policy. Henri "was only five when the Revolution turned Paris into a free man's city and France into the scourge of Europe" (*TP* 16). And Villanelle grew up in a Venice transformed by Bonaparte into "an enchanted island for the mad, the rich, the bored, the perverted" (*TP* 52). But they were also conditioned by fate for, long before their lives crisscrossed and became united in Russia, they already formed part of the same fatal pattern: the same day Napoleon promoted Henri to his personal service (*TP* 19), he earned the eternal hatred of the former chef, the disgusting male chauvinist and drunkard cook who was dismissed when he was found by Napoleon in a drunken stupor, only to become the supplier of meat and horses for the French army in Venice (*TP* 63) and so, eventually, Villanelle's sadistic husband. So, behind the apparently casual encounter of Henri and Villanelle in Russia, we

can trace an intricate pattern intertwining Henri's and Villanelle's lives together, which will be completed when Henri murders the cook with the help of Villanelle; and we should not forget that it is the cook who sells Villanelle to the French army in Russia as a *vivandière,* an army prostitute, thus making possible Henri's and Villanelle's encounter.

The convoluted pattern intertwining the lives of Henri and Villanelle at the story level, therefore, echoes the pattern of alternate and embedded narrations we have described at the textual level. Furthermore, both Villanelle's and Henri's stories may be seen as mirrored literary variations of the same basic fabula, synthesised in the novel's epigraph: "You have navigated with raging soul far from the paternal home, passing beyond the seas' double rocks and now you inhabit a foreign land." The words, taken from Euripides' *Medea,* [4] are spoken by the Chorus to Medea after she had found out Jason's infidelity and refer to all Medea had done and renounced for Jason's sake.[5] The epigraph, then, encapsulates within itself the core of the novel's fabula: the journey or quest, motivated by the unconquerable passion to possess something unique, in Jason's case, the Golden Fleece; in Medea's case, Jason's heart; in the case of Henri, first Napoleon's heart, then, that of Villanelle; in Villanelle's case that of "The Queen of Spades" a beautiful and mysterious Venetian lady, and in the case of this lady's husband, the most unique object of all: the Holy Grail itself, capable of restoring fertility to the waste land.

In the novel, both Villanelle's and Henri's passionate quests are simultaneously developed at three related symbolic levels: in archetypal terms, as a hero's (or heroine's) quest for maturation; in psychological terms, as an ego's quest for individuation; or in card symbolism, as the Fool's journey along the interlocking circles formed by the twenty two major arcana of the Tarot, as suggested by the titles of the first two chapters, Villanelle's job as a croupier, and the structure of the novel in two symmetrical loops overlapping in the middle (Fig. 1):

(Douglas 1972; frontispiece by David Sheridan)

Indeed, the most obvious form of symbolism in the novel is derived from the Tarot. The title of the first chapter,"The Emperor," corresponds to the fourth card of the greater arcana; the second chapter, "The Queen of Spades," to one of the four court cards in the lesser arcana. As Alfred Douglas explains, The Emperor

> indicates reason, will power, and the world of mankind on earth.... He too represents creation, but the creation of the will, not of feelings. He symbolizes power rather than love. Mythologically he is a descendant of father figures such as the Greek god Uranus.... He is the symbol of the warlike patriarchal societies which superseded the primitive agricultural cultures of the Great Mother....
>
> The Emperor as father-figure does have a positive side . . . a strong will, courage and fearlessness. On the one hand he can be an unbending tyrant, on the other a powerful ally. But he must be relied on for his strength, and not for his judgement. (1972: 56-68)

The Queen of Spades, on the other hand,

> is highly intelligent, has a complex personality and is concerned with attention to detail and accuracy in all things. She is alert to the attitudes and opinions of those around her, and skilled at balancing opposing factions whilst she furthers her own schemes. She is self-reliant, swift-acting, versatile and inventive (Douglas 1972: 142)

The difference in temperament and symbolism between The Emperor and the Queen of Spades in the Tarot cards perfectly fits the difference between Bonaparte's patriarchal world, ruled by logic, and the much more intuitive and uncanny feminine world of Venice, as Henri openly acknowledges:

> Where Bonaparte goes, straight roads follow, buildings are rationalised, street signs may change to celebrate a battle but they are always clearly marked. Here, if they bother with street signs at all, they are happy to use the same ones over again. Not even Bonaparte could rationalise Venice. (*TP* 112)

Opposed to the totalitarian patriarchal world of Napoleon's territories, Venice appears, then, as a much more complex, seductive and disquieting world, isolated from the rest by its surrounding water, and described by Villanelle as "the city of mazes" (*TP* 49). It is a weirdly fantastic world with a labyrinthine structure which, like the intestines of a living creature, is constantly changing shape, so that strangers like Henri can never find their way:

> [Henri"] "I need a map."
> [Villanelle:] "It won't help. This is a living city. Things change." (*TP* 113)

As Alfred Douglas explain, the Tarot cards consist of two packs combined: "a fifty-six card pack called the *lesser arcana* or *small cards*, and a twenty-two card pack called the *greater arcana* or Tarot trumps" (1982: 13). While the title of the first chapter ("The Emperor") is taken from the major arcana of the Tarot, the symbolism of the second chapter ("The Queen of Spades") is related to the pack of fifty-six cards called the lesser arcana, which are the source of present-day playing cards. The major arcana of the Tarot are derived from hermetic occultism: they were originally devised to represent grades or stages in a system of initiation, aimed at bringing about spiritual enlightenment. One of the twenty-two cards, The Fool, is not numbered, for he is the subject who undertakes the quest. Each of the other twenty one cards represents a crucial stage in The Fool's journey through life. As Alfred Douglas (1972: 34-35) explains, these stages follow the dual pattern of Jung's psychological process of individuation. According to Jung, the individuation process encompasses the whole life, but falls naturally into two halves. The first half is concerned with the individual's relationship to the world outside himself; it is directed towards the development of the conscious mind and the stabilization of the ego. The second half reverses this process and confronts the ego with the depths of its own psyche, seeking to establish links with the inner self, the true centre of consciousness. The two phases, which respectively recall Ulysses' external and Theseus' internal versions of the mythical hero's quest, oppose one another, yet are complementary. The major arcana of the Tarot, likewise, contain and express this dual nature of the individuation process for, as Douglas has pointed out,

> If we examine the twenty-two Tarot trumps with this in mind, we find that they fall naturally into two groups, with The Wheel of Fortune significantly at the mid-point.
>
> The turning-point between one half of life and the other is of critical importance; at the high point of physical existence one is suddenly confronted with the inevitability of death. As Jung himself has said: 'At the stroke of noon the descent begins. And the descent means the reversal of all the ideals and values that were cherished in the morning.' (1972: 35)

Arranged in sequential order, from number one to twenty one with the numberless card, the Fool, situated between the first and the last and forming two symmetric loops merging at the centre by the superposition of cards ten and twenty-one, the major arcana of the Tarot visually represent the Fool's quest for individuation in two opposed and complementary phases: one from card one to ten, is outward-looking and confronts the 'I' with the 'not I', the "Innenwelt" with the "Umwelt," the self with the world; the other, from eleven to twenty one, is inward-looking and confronts the ego with its true centre of consciousness, the inner self.

A third version of the quest incorporated into the novel is that of the mythological hero. In classical mythology there are two basic versions of the hero's quest: Ulysses' journey on water and land takes place in the open air; Theseus' quest, in the enclosed and subterranean darkness of the Minotaur's labyrinth. In *The Passion* , Henri's quest eastwards, following the course of Napoleon's military campaigns, echoes Ulysses' journey, while Villanelle's wanderings along the mysterious dark lanes and apparently dead-end canals of Venice, recall the much darker and claustrophobic wanderings of Theseus along the Cretan labyrinth. The watery Venetian maze is, like the intestines it recalls, a monstrously large and complex gutter constantly pouring out the human detritus of the city: "the exiles, the people the French drove out. These people are dead but they do not disappear" (*TP* 114). Among these living dead, which strongly echo T.S. Eliot's "hollow men," there is a weird old lady, who wears a crown "made out of rats tied in a circle by their tails" (*TP* 74), that is, a witch's quincunx or mandalic circle, evoking the hermetic occultism of the Tarot. This haggish creature is always asking the passers by, in words that recall the opening section of "Burnt Norton," "what time it might be" (*TP* 49, 54, 74 and 114). Villanelle explains to Henri, in words that are close to T.S. Eliot's description of Madame Sosostris, "the wisest woman in Europe, / With a wicked pack of cards" (1974: 64) that this repulsive soothsayer was "one of the wealthiest women in Venice" (*TP* 115)

before Napoleon seized her fortune. Therefore, this hag with the black magic crown echoes and varies the symbolism of Madame Sosostris in *The Waste Land*, who used the ancient and powerful magic of the Tarot in a devalued and meaningless way in order to earn her living by casting horoscopes. Thus, through Villanelle's haggish friend, the symbolism of the quest acquires further accreations derived from Eliot's version of it in *The Waste Land* , hinting at a fourth overall symbolic level, that knits the mythological, psychological and Tarot symbolisms together: that of literature itself.

In Jorge Luis Borges' "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan" we find the story of Ts'ui Pên, the man who gave up everything in order to concentrate on the composition of a book and of a labyrinth. When, after thirteen years of total dedication to this double task Ts'ui Pên was murdered, the only thing that was found in his rooms was a bulky manuscript containing "un acervo indeciso de borradores contradictorios" (Borges 1989: 476), a vague heap of contradictory drafts, that simultaneously offered the reader not one alternative line of development among many, but rather, all kinds of alternatives, every possible combination and conclusion. As the narrator reflects, nobody could find the labyrinth because "[t]odos imaginaron dos obras; nadie pensó que libro y laberinto eran un solo objeto" (Borges 1989: 477). That is, the narrator finds the labyrinth nobody had been able to spot when he realises that book and labyrinth were not two different objects, but one, that the book was "un laberinto de laberintos" (1989: 475) a labyrinth of labyrinths. The reader of Ts'ui Pen's infinitely circular book, in which all conceivable *dénouements* are possible, is given the possibility of endlessly reading, and so living, the same events in infinitely various ways. In Borges' tale, then, the book as labyrinth becomes the path for the hero's quest, and so, his world.

By sitting down to re-read and re-write his and Villanelle's life stories, arranging and linking the events that make up their lives in a chain of cause and effect, Henri is, like Borges' hero, situating Villanelle and himself within the limits of the cardboard covers of his own book and undertaking a further quest along the paths of a world of paper and ink.

In this sense, it is significant to point out that Borges constantly identifies books with the world and also books with mirrors. In "El espejo de tinta" (1989: 341-343), for example, a magician brings about the tyrant's death by forcing him to "write" and "read" the ceremony of his own future death in the mirror-like pool of ink poured in the hollow of his hand. In "La biblioteca de Babel" (1989: 465-471) the universe is a limitless library, made up of hexagonal galleries and bottomless wells arranged around a spiralling

stair without beginning or end, reduplicated by a mirror. It is a "total" library, whose shelves "registran todas las posibles combinaciones de los veintitantos símbolos ortográficos . . . o sea todo lo que es dable pensar" (1989: 467). Borges' Library of Babel, registering all possible combinations of the twenty-odd orthographic symbols and containing everything that is thinkable recalls the ancient gnostic and hermetic as well as the Judeo-Christian and cabalistic cosmogonies, according to which the Universe is a total book written by God and foretells the deconstructivist contention that the text pre-exists the writer, that writer and reader are part of the text.

Within the context of Borges' *Ficciones,* Henri's writing and reading of his own war journal/diary becomes a further metaphor of his hero's quest for individuation, with the notebook acting as Henri's Borgean "espejo de tinta" or mirror of ink where he can see himself and his world for the first time as what they truly are. Significantly, it is re-reading his notebook in the madhouse that Henri eventually understands the difference between his infatuation for Napoleon and his true love for Villanelle and this knowledge casts new light on his own apprehension of himself:

> I re-read my notebook today and I found:
>
> I say I'm in love with her, what does that mean?
>
> It means I review my future and my past in the light of this feeling. It is as though I wrote in a foreign language that I am suddenly able to read. Wordlessly she explains me to myself; like genius she is ignorant of what she does.
>
> I go on writing so that I will always have something to read. (*TP* 159)

Henri expresses the difference between his infatuation with Napoleon and the true love he feels for Villanelle by drawing on the Freudian (1988) and Lacanian (1966) distinction between narcissistic "love for the 'ideal I'" and adult "love for the other":

> Her. A person who is not me. I invented Bonaparte as much as he invented himself.
>
> My passion for her, even though she could never return it, showed me the difference between inventing a lover and falling in love.
>
> The one is about you, the other about someone else. (*TP* 156)

As the above quotation makes clear, Henri is now able to reject his mirror stage love for Napoleon, "the mirror-bearer" (*TP* 154) as an illusion, and accept the mature love he feels for Villanelle as a feeling capable of dissolving his childlike self-centredness and of setting him free:

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

Henri' s rejection of Napoleon and his revelation of what true love is signifies the end of his quest. Like Perceval "the gentle knight, who came to a ruined chapel and found what the others had overlooked, simply by sitting still" (*TP* 154), Henri has found the most absolute treasure of all by giving up action and sitting down to write and read.

Sitting still in the volontary isolation of his brain-like cell, Henri, like the heroes of many other experimental writers, such as Kafka, Proust, Borges, Robbe-Grillet, Beckett, Golding, Durrell and Fowles, weaves the labyrinthine pattern of his own life into a journal, only to discover that, in Gabriel Josipovici's words: "the writing *was* the travelling (1971: 306). This discovery amounts to the exhilarating experience of the existentialist, seized by the *joie de vivre,* the *delirium vivens,* that comes together with the acceptance of his position in the universe, the submission to the "reality principle," for as he renounces immortality and accepts his limitations he is given climactic insight into the true, limitless, nature of man:

> The book becomes an object among many in the room. Open and read, it draws the reader into tracing the contours of his own labyrinth and allows him to experience himself not as an object in the world but as *the limits of his world. And, mysteriously, to recognise this is to be freed of these limits* and to experience a joy as great as that which floods through us when, looking at long distance, with Dante, into the eyes of God, we sense the entire universe bound up into one volume *and understand what it is to be a man.* (Josipovici 1971: 309; my emphasis)

In his review of *The Passion,* David Lodge accused Jeanette Winterson of appropriating lines from T.S. Eliot for no clear reason at all. As we have seen, these appropriations are only the most obvious of many others in a

novel that is literally clogged with literary allusions, ranging from Homer and Euripides to Joyce,[6] Pushkin[7] and Borges for, besides labyrinths and mirrors, Jeanette Winterson owes to Borges even the wonderfully uncanny idea of the beating heart separated from its body (cf. "Las ruinas circulares," 1989: 153).[8]

Still, more important than the list of borrowings is the discovery of Jeanette Winterson's aim in borrowing. Coming as s/he does at the end of a centuries-long literary tradition, the contemporary writer is anxiously aware that, in Josipovici's words (1971: 293), "literature moves inevitably towards a mode of total possibility — a *langue* without *paroles* — ." The exhilarating awareness of total possibility is constantly undermined, however, by the anxious realisation of "the necessity of choice." So, according to Josipovici,

> Where Frye is perfectly happy to reiterate Shelley's remark that all literature is 'that one great poem, which all poets, like the co-operating thoughts of one great mind, have built up since the beginning of the world', a writer like Kafka or Eliot feels himself forced to ask: "But how do *I* relate to this great poem?" . . . . Two possibilities seem to be open to the writer: either he can go on adding yet more items to the body of literature and ignore the problem altogether; or he can give up writing altogether. *The modern writer does neither. Instead, he makes his art out of the exploration of the relation between his unique life and the body of literature, his book and the world.* (1971: 291; my emphasis)

In this light, Jeanette Winterson's fragmented and repetitive version of Napoleon's historical campaigns, focused from the decentralised or "fringe" perspectives of a French cook and an Italian bi-sexual woman, is, like T. S. Eliot's "heap of broken images" (1974: 63) the only kind of "historical" account she can aspire to offer: a self-consciously parodic and overtly literary text, indulgently relishing its own stylistic virtuosity and simultaneously evincing the "anxiety of influence," the pressure exerted on her writing by the bulk of the Western tradition of literature which, as John Barth (1967 and 1980) and Harold Bloom (1975) among others have explained, it must acknowledge, absorb and recast.

That we should be willing to grant that this heap of broken images accurately expresses the world-view of this young feminist writer, Jeanette Winterson, depends on the readiness of the reader to recognise, beneath the wealth of fragmented mythical, archetypal, psychological and literary echoes, the labyrinth of labyrinths, the unifying metaphor that gives the novel and her

world-view cohesion: the contemporary writer's quest for individuation along the only knowable world: the uncanny mirror of ink.

NOTES

1. The research carried out for the writing of this paper has been financed by the Spanish Ministry of Education (DGICYT: Programa Sectorial de Promoción General del Conocimiento, 1991)

2. In his essay on "The Uncanny" (1988: 2483-2506), Freud analysed at length the etymology of the German word "unheimlich" and its corresponding terms in Latin, Greek, English, French and Spanish, with a view to explaining the specifically ambivalent effect produced in certain epileptic crises and cases of madness as well as by traditional fairy tales and fantastic literature in general. As Freud explains (1988: 2484), the word "un-heimlich" is the antonym of "heimlich," homely, familiar, comfortable, intimate, secret and domestic, thus conveying the notion of what is uncomfortable, uneasy, gloomy, dismal ghastly and uncanny in the otherwise familiar and intimate. Following E. Jentsch, Freud offers as a prototypical example of this "uncanny" effect the shocking and anguishing epistemological doubt produced by the sight of something inanimate that appears to be somehow also animate (1988: 2488).

3. "tout ce qui le met en relation manifeste ou secrète, avec d'autres textes'. (Genette 1982: 7)

4. çu; d j ejk me;n oijj;kwn patrivwn ej;pleuçaç mainomevnai kradivai, diduvmouç oJrivçaça povntou pevtraç: ejpi; de; xevnai (Euripides, *Medea,* 432-435).

5. After Hera, aided by Aphrodite, had caused her to fall in love with Jason, Medea helped Jason and the Argonauts to run away with the Golden Fleece, incidentally murdering her own brother, Absyrtus, in the course of their flight. Impelled by her passion for Jason, Medea, therefore, betrayed her father, killed her brother and exiled herself from her homeland for ever. She later used her magic power to renew the youth of Jason's father, Aeson. But in spite of all these proofs of love, Jason soon fell in love with another woman, Glauce of Corinth, and Jason's father, enraged with Medea's terrible threats after she discovered Jason's infidelity, condemned her to a further exile, which is the point at which the chorus speak to her.

6. Apart from the overall topos of the hero's quest shared by *The Passion* and Joyce's major novels, we can also see an intertextual echo of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in Villanelle's name that recalls Stephen Dedalus' love poem about Emma, a villanelle (1969: 202).

7. Pushkin's uncanny short-story, "The Queen of Spades" (1967) is the most obvious intertext of the "Queen of Spades" chapter in *The Passion*. Another is the Queen of Spades in *Alice in Wonderland.*

8. Indebtness to Borges can be taken to surprising extremes, when one thinks, for example, that Borges was punished to work for several months as "chicken inspector" during Peron's regime. The passion for chicken also recalls that of another patriarchal figure, the archbishop in Gabriel García Márquez's *Crónica de una muerte anunciada,* who has a devastating passion for chicken-comb soup.

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