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USE-LESS BODIES: WRITING THE BODY, REWRITING TRADITION. THE CASE OF *SEXING THE CHERRY*

According to Michel Foucault, "the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body."(1991: 26) Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* proposes *use-less* bodies as the model for female liberation suggesting that, by unveiling and rejecting all the traditional discourses inscribed on women's bodies, and their primary function – reproduction – female liberation becomes concretely possible. Once freed, the body does no longer convey pre-established discourses and is able to create new ones. It becomes free and unproductive in terms of traditional discourses, an 'artistic' body in the twofold sense of body of the artist and artistic object. As such, this new way of living one's corporeity becomes the starting point for a new aesthetic experience. The body is revealed as something that is never 'pure', never male or female *tout court*, since the central metaphor in the novel is the metaphor of *graft*. Graft allows the body to become the place for hybridation as well as for the destruction of limits and discourses of gender, which appears as the foundation of creativity. This creativity cannot help but be 'postmodern', since it is completely based on a graft: of bodies on other bodies, voices on other voices, tradition on innovation, male on female and vice versa, reality on imagination, originating a fusion that is proposed as the model for the future. The novel also saves another feature that, according to Linda Hutcheon, is an essential characteristic of the postmodern: its distrust of grand narratives.

Winterson's narration, besides, can be included in the category of that *women's experimental fiction* which Friedman and Fuchs describe in *Breaking the Sequence. Women's Experimental Fiction*: a non-linear, non-hierarchical and decentred narrative form breaking, decomposing and subverting the rules of traditional fiction. Significantly, the French feminists read this kind of literature as a narration that "writes the body" (1989: 4). *Sexing the Cherry* displays a very close correspondence between writing and the body: the former – fragmented, decentred and hybrid – mirrors the characteristics of the bodies appearing in the novel, in a play of continual cross-references

that deconstructs traditional writing, providing it with an unprecedented physicality, as well as the body, playing with its cultural meanings.

The novel deconstructs bodies as cultural constructs by continually constructing and deconstructing a web of bodily, geographical and cultural maps connected to the exercise of power. The starting point for this process lies in the male protagonist's narration, which is presented as the story of Jordan's journey across the unknown lands of a New World that is described as a heavenly place. The description of this New World, however, turns out not to be the story of the adventures of an explorer who discovers and colonizes a geographical area that is still virgin, as much as the discovery of a feminine world that, after centuries of forced silence, is eager to talk about itself[1]. In this way, the narration of Jordan's colonization of the Americas becomes a story that is continually invaded and ultimately *colonized* by the voices of some women that Jordan meets during his imaginary journeys. With their stories of love and death, suffering and redemption, these women manage to occupy the space of Jordan's narrative, originating a gallery of female characters whose concreteness gives a physical quality to the immaterial narration of the protagonist. Taken all together, these stories contribute to rewriting the literary and historical tradition of Western civilization, unveiling its being inscribed on female bodies through a set of ethical and behavioural norms limiting and directing their functioning. The novel reveals that these norms are inscribed on the bodies primarily through the discourses of religion and sexuality, since they are the discourses that most effectively and rigidly discipline bodies and their functioning. The stories of all the female characters of the novel, then, trace a sort of map of the web of religion and sexuality that is inscribed on female bodies in order for society to keep control over women's lives.

These two discourses are revealed as central to Western civilization since they are power instruments. In the novel, this is underlined by the recurrence of two kinds of characters: those associated with religion (nuns, monks, Puritans) and those – not always opposed to the former – linked to a peculiar use of sexuality: prostitutes[2]. Obvi-

[1] The link between the representation of female bodies and geographical language, besides, seems to be a well-established cliché within the English literature of the period in which the novel is principally set. Seventeenth-century authors such as John Donne frequently used geographical metaphors in the description of female bodies. On John Donne see for example Sawday, chapter 2.

[2] In the Nineteenth century, according to Foucault, their activities were a form of "useful delinquency", as they were able to attract a wide set of different interests, including those of the police. See Foucault (1991: 279-80).

ously, they are linked to definite cultural meanings and specific behavioural norms. These, however, are destabilized in the novel, which displays the lived instability or even the semantic interchangeability of cultural inscriptions that are not interiorized but never fail to be coercive toward female bodies and thus female lives.

In this sense, there does not seem to be a significant difference between nuns and prostitutes: both are female figures associated with specific behavioural norms to the point that they appear to be the two faces of one single coin, that of male impositions. However, the novel shows that these are not interiorized but frequently work – paradoxically – as a sort of screen that hides a certain freedom of movement. These two different figures, then, are frequently connected, as in the case of the convent lying along the same stream as the brothel: the two places appear to be open to each other or even interchangeable:

> Some of the women had lovers in the convent; others, keeping a change of clothes there, went their way in the outside world. (...) Their owner, being a short-sighted man of scant intelligence, never noticed that the women under his care were always different. (...) Some years later I heard that he had come into his pleasure chamber one day and found it absolutely empty of women and of treasures. He never fathomed the matter and made no connection between that event and the sudden increase in novitiates at the Convent of the Holy Mother (31).

Thus, women who made different life choices – if they were choices – do not seem to be very different from one another. Both choices seem to involve a kind of submission that is not really such: these women have a great freedom of movement, enrichment and love. Besides, the man significantly considers these women as a kind of property; he owns them as one owns a flock of sheep and conceives of it as a group of undistinguishable and interchangeable beings devoid of any forms of interiority. His ownership, then, is limited to their bodies and later on he will lose that as well. Besides, it is to be noticed that the convent is dedicated to the *Holy Mother*. She is both the heavenly mother who seems to be protecting these childless women and the holy virgin who owns all the attributes that are traditionally attached to women: daughter, mother and virgin. The status of this model within catholic tradition has been analyzed by Julia Kristeva in "Stabat Mater" as the model of a woman who enjoys a perfection that is out of reach. It is for this reason that she becomes a model for earthly women and stimulates men's desire for an inaccessible woman. This figure, anyway, does not seem to be a model for the women in the novel, despite presiding a discourse on moth-

erhood that permeates the novel and will be dealt with later on. For the moment, it is sufficient to say that this figure seems to be protecting the novel's women and many of these female characters bear some of her features within themselves.

As for the stream that connects the convent and the brothel, it works as a temporal connector just like the other rivers in the novel[3]. Significantly, in this way religion and sexuality emerge within the novel as two factors that are connected and determinant in the development of Western history and culture. Jordan visits a city where love has murdered all the population except for a monk and a prostitute. As a consequence, these two had to repopulate the place. Therefore, they are the progenitors of the new city, a city that is hypermodern in the alienation experienced by its inhabitants, who are denied to right to nourish any feelings, or precisely: "They were urged to put aside any romantic fancies, the sexes were carefully segregated and all marriages were arranged. Sex itself, tending as it does to fire the heart as well as the groin, was possible only for the purposes of childbearing"(75). Of course, this is a metaphor for the loss of values that is taking place in our civilization, but at the same time it is a parody of its history: its roots are to be found in these two factors – religion and sexuality – and precisely in their worst form (a whore and a libidinous monk). It is in controlling these two elements, the novel seems to be suggesting, that one gains access to power[4].

In the novel, this lesson seems to have been deeply and fruitfully understood by a specific group: Puritans. While fighting in a religious war, they also fight for the control over sexuality, which grants them power over their wives and thus over whole society. Therefore, when the wife of Dog Woman's Puritan neighbour confesses: "He has never kissed me for fear of lust" (27), the protagonist cannot help commenting: "It is a true saying, that what you fear you find" (*ibid.*). Indeed, the war in which the Puritans are involved is narrated as a battle over power expressing itself on two fronts: the house, where woman is to be submitted and sexuality kept under control to the point of copulating only for procreative reasons, and the outer world, where sexuality is to be explicitly rejected. However, the Pu-

[3] The river clearly plays this role in the novel: the Thames, for example, is only referred to when Dog Woman finds a newborn Jordan floating in the river, linking Seventeenth-century century London with religious history, and when she tells about the alleged discovery of some Roman artefacts in the Thames.

[4] Significantly, this form of control is similar to that imagined in *1984* by George Orwell, while in *Brave New World* Aldous Huxley reverses the terms but plays with the same elements.

ritans' sexuality is not that rejected and tends to emerge in specific places, where it merges with their desire for power. Inside the brothel, for example, they display grotesque perversions and seem to be specifically aroused by playing games in which they pretend to be great historical personalities such as Caesar and Brutus. Again, it is Dog Woman who ironically produces a metaphor for this kind of power when, wishing to see the king's beheading, pretends to be suffering with a venereal disease and says that "the Rule of Saints cannot begin in pus" (69). In this sense, venereal disease and pus become a symbol for the depravity of this power, which spreads as morbidly and uncontrolled as an infection[5]. The diseased body, then, becomes the metaphor for a society that is submitted to an oppressive power that spreads like a disease to every single organ risking to suffocate the organism from within.

In this world of religious war and arranged marriages, female characters (Dog Woman included) find themselves trapped between submission and rebellion. So, whereas some of them cannot avoid the former (the Puritans' wives, Zillah who was bricked up alive in the tower she had to build herself, the Twelve Dancing Princesses who were forced to get married, and so on), others appear to be enjoying a space of inner resistance allowing them a certain freedom of movement as long as they do not explicitly revolt. Jordan himself witnesses this when, wearing female clothes, realizes that women live in a world of their own and have shocking opinions about the male universe: "The conspiracy of women shocked me" (32), he comments in astonishment. These forms of resistance, however, can take different shapes. As an instance, if such an uncommon woman as Dog Woman takes active part in the war of her time, other women do not fight but still manage to take a stand. The female protagonist tells that some women manage to save the window of a church after it has been crashed by the Puritans' iconoclastic fury. Clearly, they want to save God's word and oppose it to the ready-made speeches of Cromwell's followers:

> There was a group of women gathered round the remains of the glass which coloured the floor brighter than any carpet of flowers in a parterre. They were women who had cleaned the window, polishing the slippery fish our Lord had blessed in his outstretched hands, scraping away the candle smoke from the feet of the Apostles. They loved the window. *Without speaking*, and in common purpose, the women began to gather the pieces

[5] Significantly, this spreading infection is situated in a female body and this suggests a certain uniformity of views with the Puritans about women.

of the window in their baskets (63-64, my italics).

Women do not speak: to male rhetoric and fury they can only oppose a concrete gesture of recomposition, although it is aimed at saving something that, as the novel demonstrates, has always been used to oppress them. Their silence expresses their will not to overlap their voices to religious narrative, which would mean altering it, and their wish to reconstruct it as it was and pass it down as it was passed down to them[6]. It is an act of *passive resistance*, inspired to the precise wish to reject the imposition of a new religion[7] and essentially an act of strong opposition to the Puritans' verbose and intolerant narration. This act of passive resistance is allowed by a specific use of the female body that becomes visible in its passivity when it opposes to the destructive actions performed by the Puritans. Besides, the window is a surface located in an intermediate position between outside and inside, and therefore it becomes a sort of metaphor for the feminine, which goes out to the external world always keeping a strong interiority. Destroying it means destroying female interiority but also the ability to mediate that is characteristics of such a hard but fragile surface as glass, which is, just like the female body, fit to passive resistance. Indeed, through the whole novel, the male body always appears to be acting in this 'imperialistic' way, in a work of systematic destruction and control of all that is not itself.

The Twelve Dancing Princesses, on the contrary, do not limit themselves to passive resistance, although their stories do not parallel the violent excesses of Dog Woman's life. Their collective story is about violence from the beginning, as it talks about the control of their sexuality through an arranged marriage, a settlement that religious authorities sanction in spite of the contrasting opinion of one of the contracting parties. In this sense, the episode of the collective wedding is highly relevant within the novel. It is about the twelve sisters having to build an ice church for the ceremony after modelling, of their own initiative, ice statues portraying mythological and biblical scenes. The resulting scenery is a sort of winter garden representing nearly all Western religious tradition, from classical mythol-

[6] This juxtaposition between female silence and the multiplication of male and sexist discourses is of course a topos in much Feminist and feminine literature. Winterson, for instance, had already dealt with it in her minor novel *Boating for Beginners*.

[7] Here one cannot avoid noticing that at present as well as in the past, many protestant denominations have woman preachers or even pastors, but this element is totally missing in the novel: the religious fight in Seventeenth-century London is essentially described as a power fight between two male factions.

ogy to Christian tradition, with references to the Ancient Testament. It turns out to be a sort of map of all that has oppressed women for centuries or even millennia. The ice church, on its part, stands out as a monument to the coldness of the lives they are destined to and an ice grave for their hearts, one that will imprison them in a state of death in life. Significantly, these loveless marriages are celebrated in winter, the season traditionally associated with death: the princesses' lives seem to be ending on this day and, moreover, none of these marriages will be able to create new lives. All of these unions will be as unfruitful as a snow-covered garden.

On the other hand, the church and the statues are not destined to last long, because the season cycle inevitably leads to the thaw. This suggests that the repressive power of marriage over the young women will not last long either. To build the church, besides, the princesses cut their fingers, "and the blood stained the snow like the wild red roses in the hedges" (94). Of course this suggests a sexual metaphor in the purest fairytale style, but it also makes impure the snow with which the young women build the church, creating an analogy with the impiety of an institution, the church, that has always celebrated weddings without really asking for the bride's consent and has always supported female oppression. As a result for the loss of innocence caused by the arranged weddings, the princesses can only wear red wedding dresses, since red is the colour of sin – the sin that someone is committing in forcing them to get married –, passion – the passion they nurture inside –, and fire – the fire that will blaze at the end of the novel. As a whole, then, the distorted narration of the wedding day provides the reader with some clues or a commentary about the unusual way in which these marriages will end.

At the point of intersection between religion and sexuality lies the issue of motherhood, which is one of the central themes associated to the female body and thus to femininity. This element is presented as an essential battleground in the war between the opportunities for coercion and liberation that are inscribed on female bodies: once again, religion and sexuality are central because they work to ensure that the reproductive dynamics occur within precise parameters[8]. The married princesses' infertility thus becomes a form of passive resistance and, according to a cliché of feminine literature, opens a way

[8] Motherhood, of course, is not limited to this and feminist critics and theorists have provided different readings of it. Good examples of the different views of the meaning of motherhood can be found in Suleiman, in Jacobus, Fox Keller and Shuttleworth, and in part also in Braidotti (See Chapter One).

for literary creativity. In their case, creativity works to re-write tradition in order to make room for female voices. The denial of motherhood seems to be the constant for the women in the novel: the only woman who is referred to as a mother, except for Dog Woman's mother, is the above quoted prostitute repopulating her city with the monk. Anyway, she seems to have had children because of a kind of sense of duty (despite the lovers are "cheered by their admirable plan" [75]), and in the same way mothering is a duty for all the women who are forced to get married, like the Twelve Dancing Princesses, who however do not give any heirs to their oppressive father. The female characters can thus be divided into two groups: those who are forced not to have children and those who choose not to. The former group includes nuns[9], prostitutes and, in a sense, the Puritans' wives, who are never referred to as mother but only as victims of their husbands' sex phobia. In this group, however, I would also include Jordan's natural mother[10]: she is an example of denied motherhood because she abandoned her son, whether she did it because of her early death in childbirth or of her being unable to bring up the fruit of an illicit relationship or even of a rape. The latter group includes the Twelve Dancing Princesses, whose rejection of motherhood functions as a form of passive resistance, a way to take their stand with their bodies against the violence of the power that controls them. For this reason, within the novel, they open up the way for a feminist discourse about free choice but also for a wider discourse on sexuality. In general, however, it is to be noticed that the basic productive function linked to female bodies, reproduction, is not present in the novel.

Dog Woman stands apart and outside both groups. She has got an adoptive son she decided to take care of following the positive memories of her own mother. Having a son, she breaks two whole sets of rules: she breaks biological rules because her size has always prevented her from sexual intercourse, and cultural rules, because the frightening warrior virgin does not correspond to the characteristics we tend to associate to a mother. As both mother and virgin, then, Dog Woman the sinner clearly becomes a parody of the traditional image of the Virgin-Mother[11] that dominates catholic tradition and, through the lay version of the Angel in the House, Protestant

[9] I place the nuns in this group since I assume that in the Seventeenth century taking one's vows was frequently not a matter of free choice.

[10] Who, of course, never appears as a character in the novel. Clearly, however, her role in giving birth to Jordan is paramount in the novel.

[11] As Cimitile also notices.

culture as well[12]. Dog Woman takes on multiple cultural meanings, becoming in a sense a summary of all the female characters appearing in the novel: she is both a virgin and a mother, and her motherhood has got an explicitly religious significance since her son was found floating in a river like Moses, and named after the river of the Holy Land. This link with religion is strengthened through a biblical quotation – "Remember the rock from whence ye are hewn and the pit from wence ye are digged" (10) – she inscribes on a medallion she gives to her son as a sign of her contribution to his entry in the religious community. Dog Woman is, besides, associated to mythology: as a warrior virgin owning a team of dogs, she is Artemis' alter ego as well as the alter ego of other traditional female characters. As Cimitile notices, chastity is archetypally associated to courage, heroism and purity: virgins traditionally fight in the name of the Lord, as Joan of Arc or Bradamante in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. In a sense, Dog Woman fights in the name of the Lord, or at least this is what she states, but she cannot be compared to these archetypal virgins in any other sense (See Cimitile: 1992, 109).

Besides, if we agree with Jana L. French that "in *Sexing the Cherry* desire is linked to images of physical excess" (1999: 245)[13], we must conclude that with her excessive physicality, Dog Woman is the emblem of the disruptive desire manifested by other female characters in the novel, although, as we will see, her peculiarity is the rupturing incapacity to control her impulses. Besides, she is in another sense radically different from the traditional figure of the virgin mother: as a little girl, she killed her own father. This, according to psychoanalysis, is a prerogative of sons and therefore it does not pertain to daughters, especially to holy ones.

It is clear, at this point, that the female characters' bodies appear to have been inscribed with multiple cultural meanings by the narratives of religion and sexuality. Women who decide to rebel, then, can only do it through the assertion of their own physicality. This goes through different phases: free expression of oneself and one's desire, rejection of motherhood, violence. This assertion of one's self, however, does not have to be a mere occupation of some space in the world: it has to be conveyed by a narrative modality that is able to

[12] To the attentive reader, besides, this figure reminds of the characters of Jeanette's mother in Winterson's first novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*.

[13] On the contrary, Dog Woman's excessive physicality is read by Ornella De Zordo as a reference to the power of the maternal element and of reproductive function, linking Dog Woman to the Goddes-Mother of the pre-oedipal civilisations (2000: 427-448).

narrate and, in this way, legitimize and record experiences never told before. This is what the Twelve Dancing Princesses do: in order to express their experience, they are forced to create a narrative space at the intersection of different genres, since this is the only way to find some space and a narrative form for experiences that have always been excluded from representation. In this way, they do what Friedman and Fuchs attribute to Twentieth-century women experimental writers:

> In exploding dominant forms, women experimental writers not only assail the social structure, but also produce an alternate fictional space, a space in which the feminine, marginalized in traditional fiction and patriarchal culture, can be expressed. Thus, the rupturing of traditional forms becomes a political act, and the feminine narrative resulting from such rupture is allied with the feminist project (1989: 4).

Significantly, in fact, the background for the Twelve Dancing Princesses reworking of canonical literature, conquest of a narrative space and claim to the existence and strength of female desire, is a fairytale world. This genre was first read by feminists as a set of oppressive narrations, and later on rediscovered exactly for this reason and the consequent intrinsic possibility to explode it from within[14]. Within this narrative frame, then, the eleven Princesses[15] signal the limitedness of the fairytale model, in which a father gives his daughters to whoever will be able to discover their secret, without however asking for his daughters' consent. Here, on the contrary, the young daughters explicitly communicate their discontent and are punished for having a life of their own – they were dancers (or artists, at a metaphorical level) who did not want to become wives. Their stories, then, mix two different fairytale models, both oppressive towards them: the punishment for a transgressor and the reward for a cunning hero[16]. The young women are in this sense victims of a twofold male narration, but are not willing to passively accept their destiny.

[14] The best known example of this reappropriation of fairy tales is probably Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*, a collection of short stories that Winterson knows for sure, since in her *Art Objects: Essays on Art and Effrontery* Winterson says that Carter is one of the authors who were fundamental in her formation. Besides, some theories have it that the fairy tale was born as an oral narration composed by pheasant women to pass down some basic notions. If this genre really has feminine origins, it can be effectively considered the first genre women must reappropriate. On the theories of the female origins of fairy tales, see for example Makinen (2001: 56-57).

[15] Fortunata will be dealt with separately.

[16] All my assumptions about fairy tales are based on the seminal text by V.J. Propp.

Each of them communicates her own desire and then rebels, originating an individual story that is at the same time similar to the stories of her sisters. The eleven stories of unhappy marriages can be divided into several groups creating a map of the subversion of traditional roles: some of them love another woman and thus leave their husbands, others kill their husbands because they ill-treat them or simply because these women cannot bear conjugal life, others leave or kill their husbands because they do not love them back or even betray them. Theirs are stories of suffering caused by men, and in order to tell them, women must appropriate male word, using traditional narrative patterns (fairytale, the love-death cliché, the Gothic, etc.) or even parodying canonical authors such as Byron, Browning, Lewis Carroll or even Shakespeare. The ending is in the purest – and at the same time most subversive – fairytale style: the sisters lived happily ever after, but not with their husbands.

The twelve sisters' subversion, therefore, mainly lies in the expression of female desire, which is juxtaposed to the passivity men expect women to display. Besides, they provide a systematic demonstration of the failure of marriage and legitimize homosexual love, or, in Jana L. French's words:

> In her revision of the standard fairytale, then, Winterson grants authenticity to sexual experience outside the standard fairy tale marriage plot and thus legitimates female sexuality outside the boundaries of the reproductive role our culture has assigned to it. This clears space for same-sex unions; as Jordan demonstrates, it also makes room for more humane relationships between the sexes (1999: 247).

The twelfth princess, Fortunata, also has two peculiar stories to tell: the above quoted story of their collective wedding's day, with her fairytale quality, and Artemis' story, in which the Orion myth is re-read in a feminist key. Quite convincingly, Cimitile reads Artemis as the link between Dog Woman and Fortunata. It is undeniable, however, that Artemis is quite unique: this rewriting of a mythological figure that "didn't want to get married, didn't want to have children [but only] wanted to hunt" (Winterson: 2001, 131) proposes another choice about the use of one's body. She rejects sexuality and retrieves the male element of hunting as a primal link with nature, which however does not coincide with the limited traditional notion of the female body as nature opposed to male rationality as culture.

It is through this rewriting of fairytales, myth and other traditional genres, then, that female voices express their desire managing to occupy a space that was originally destined to contain Jordan's narration. The large amount of space occupied by female voice and ex-

pression within the male protagonist's narrative frame shows that Winterson distances herself from her main influence, Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, and completely overturns it. As Palmer explains[17], the Italian writer's narrative is a sexist narration in which all the cities have a female name imposed by the male colonizer, "with the result that the series as a whole assumes the significance of a male erotic fantasy or topography of desire" (1998: 113). In *Sexing the Cherry*, on the contrary, every city is a female conquest since it adds something to the representation of female interiority and to this topography of female desire. Jordan's journey is a journey inside woman's personality and in the meanderings of her desire, a journey that operates a subversion of explorers' traditional narrations based on the metaphor of America as a mysterious and savage woman to be violated and conquered[18]. This novel is characterised by a young protagonist who has got a confused sexuality and therefore is not attracted to this kind of images. Instead of using violence to explore a rich and uncontaminated land, Jordan proceeds, with great respect and curiosity, to the discovery of a female world that is anxious to talk and that loses its traditional characteristics of otherness as he progressively reveals his own sexual uncertainties. It is Jordan himself who validates this thesis when, wearing female clothes, he says: "In my petticoats I was a traveller in a foreign country" (31), where the "foreign country", the unknown and unexplored land, is female nature.

Jordan's sexual uncertainty is what enables him to structure his narration as a pastiche of different literary genres and tenses, opposed to the traditional male narration, in this case a narration of travel and conquest, an *imperialistic* narration whose voice occupies all the space. This kind of narration is largely present in the novel and is expressed through the Puritans' voice. They speak in grandiloquent speeches expressing absolute certainties and pretending a divine inspiration or, as Dog Woman comments on his neighbour's way of talking: "as though he knew God as well as I do my dogs" (31). It is clear that the war that is taking place in England between two notions of freedom of religion and the divine nature of the monarch is nothing but a war between two opposite worldviews fighting for control over culture: neither of them can co-exist with other views. Dog Woman takes an active part in this war, killing all

[17] Palmer's essay is about Winterson's *The Passion* but I assume that Calvino's *Invisible Cities* is a model also for *Sexing the Cherry*: Jordan's imaginary journeys and the cities he describes are clearly indebted to the Italian writer's narration.

[18] On the wide use of this kind of metaphors, see for example the brief explanation in Crang (1998: 63-64).

the people who do not share her opinion. In this way, she becomes the instrument of one of the fighting discourses. Significantly, the novel ends with all the four protagonists on a boat, looking at the fires started by Dog Woman and her Twentieth-century alter ego. This destructive approach is opposed to the approach of all the other women in the novel and this is evident in the opposition between the flames of the fires and the pure and immaterial light resulting from Fortunata's dance. The two destructive women refuse to express their bodies' materiality in a way that is different from the one that the novel associates with male element: physical strength, violence, the form of interaction chosen by Puritans as well as by those heroes described by Nicholas Jordan in terms of icons of sexism and, nowadays, by those capitalists without scruples that won't stop in front of nothing (and that, paradoxically, are represented by a woman, presumably one whose spirit is as disruptive as Dog Woman's). Violence is revealed as the mode of expression of an imperialistic body, which tends to expand endlessly and does not leave space for other bodies and other modes of space occupation. It acts like colonial states, which indiscriminately impose their own rules to all the countries that have been conquered. And this is also the way Dog Woman acts: her story begins when she murders her own father, goes on with killing those who do not share her opinions about the war and ends with setting fire to London, a city that she, just like the Puritans, perceives as morally dirty. Besides, this violence is associated with productive and subjected bodies that, with their own actions, convey dominant discourses and consequently contribute to consolidate the status quo and prevent the formation of new voices.

The novel, on its side, proposes a more positive way of expressing the materiality of one's body: graft. The image of the grafted cherry is one of the two dominant motives, together with Fortunata's dance. Grafting becomes the positive modality for expanding one's body: grafting female elements on a male body or vice versa, grafting a female narration on a male one, or even grafting a narration on the body or with the body, that becomes itself narration and art work. Fortunata is clearly an example of this modality: she starts from her body, from the expression of her desire, and manages to create a new form of art rooted in an aesthetic form that is traditionally female and strictly corporeal but open to the dissolution of her physicality in the universal. In this way, she stands as the opposite of the imperialistic body. However, other female characters also achieve this: by using their bodies in the ways we have seen (passive resistance, rebellion, motherhood, etc.) they can find their own space. Significantly, all of them are uncommon female figures: homosexual,

disrespectful, always daughters and never mothers, they invite us to save femininity – after all, “the cherry grew, and we have sexed it and it is female” (79) – experiencing it with more freedom. In this way, they gain a bigger freedom of expression, as that enjoyed by Fortunata. The light of her dance is like a dazzling path for all those who want to get rid of “the burdens of their gender” (31) and live a fully satisfying life. Fortunata’s form of grafting is positive, since she does not renounce her spiritual dimension, while the two female “pyromaniacs” seem to leave it behind and turn their hybrid bodies into “war machines”[19]. Jordan too testifies of a successful grafting: he has got mixed gender features, he travels as a colonial traveller but instead of looking for conquest, he looks for knowledge[20]. The lack of any desire for conquest makes him careful and curious, and enables him to discover an unexplored continent and turn it into a present for the whole world rather than keeping it as a trophy. Besides, the lack of rational direction and the impossibility to map his route to Fortunata are situated within that process of construction and deconstruction of traditional cultural markers that characterizes the novel: Fortunata cannot be found with the rationality of geography or through the *topoi* of narrative tradition. One can find her only by following an inner route, which is windy and complicated by nature. The lack of markers characterizing Jordan’s journey is perfectly mirrored in hybridity as characteristic of a body, an identity and a culture that are unstable and always in process, modelling themselves through grafting.

The graft metaphor, besides, sums up the novel’s morale in another sense: it hopes for a hybrid sexual identity for contemporary mankind, as Laura Doan explains:

> The cherry, an emblem of virginity and a euphemism for the hymen, anticipates a solution well beyond the fruit metaphor or the superficial ‘peel’ of cross-dressing; it is a solution that anticipates a different order to supplant

[19] Although their motives are not always negative: in a sense, the two women fight against the hypocrisy and violence of certain groups, but in doing this they make the mistake of choosing the same means that those groups use.

[20] Curiously enough, Jordan never meets colonial otherness. With the only exception of one brief mention to the Hopi Indians (the matriarchal people also quoted in the novel’s epigraph), Jordan only visits urban spaces having a strong Western or even strictly English characterization, whose populations are Westerners and share Jordan’s culture. Besides, the fact that Jordan comes back from his journeys with a pineapple, the fruit that the novel associates to the female element, is a metaphor for the fact that what the young man brings home from his journey is the female world, which he is offering as a present to the world.

> the old. (…) What Butler pioneers theoretically, Winterson enacts in her metafictional writing practices: a sexual politics of heterogeneity and a vision of hybridized gender constructions outside an either/or proposition, at once political and postmodern (1994: 152-154).

And in the light of these new gender theories there arises a new literature as well. It is the literature produced in the first instance by the Twelve Dancing Princesses, and cannot but be hybrid. It is a literature that gives voice to woman and her desire but grafting on the male cultural tradition: the tradition of the Bible, of the quest, of fairytales, of Nineteenth and Twentieth-century poetry and, of course, the tradition of *Gulliver's Travels*, the first model for Jordan's journey. The metaphor of destruction through fire, in fact, is not the successful solution for a woman who wishes to be a writer: it does not erase everything, leaves a chance to rebuild from the ruins[21] and at the same time pretends to ignore that the canon includes many extremely valuable works, works that cannot be undervalued nor rejected *a priori*. In this way, Winterson enters the feminist debate about women writers' relationship with the literary canon[22] and opts for a kind of literature recognizing the male tradition as the starting point but proceeding in new and different directions, leaving women the opportunity to express their voice and that language that Jordan talks about, originating a literary grafting.

This new culture, however, is not only the result of a fruitful fusion of female and male voices: it originates a personality that is essentially hybrid and, consequently, can be defined as androgynous. In brief, Winterson proposes a new version of that androgynous writing already theorized decades earlier by another English author with whom she is deeply indebted: Virginia Woolf[23]. She proves to be a model for the new generations of women writers, whichever their themes and notions of sex and gender may be[24]. Winterson's narrative production in fact proceeded with the experiment of the genderless narrator of *Written on the Body*, emblematic of a new conception of fiction and, mostly, of sexual identity.

[21] Modern readers know that after the Great Fire, London was rebuilt and enjoyed a period of great wealth and beauty.

[22] On the relationship between Feminist and postmodernist writers and the canon see for example Allen (2000: 133-208).

[23] To her, Winterson dedicates two chapters of her *Art Objects* and undoubtedly the character of Villanelle in Winterson's *The Passion* owes much to Woolf's *Orlando*.

[24] The androgynous writing of Woolf and Winterson's *Art and Lies*, together with the use of the term 'androgynous' in the Feminism of the last three decades, is well explained in Burns.

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