Foreign Bodies: The Grotesque Body in the Fiction of Jeanette Winterson

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Referring to the ideas of Mary Russo, Julia Kristeva and other postmodern critics and theorists, my essay discusses the representation of the grotesque body and its significance in terms of gender and sexual orientation in Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion, Sexing the Cherry* and *Written on the Body*. Winterson, as I illustrate, utilises the motif of the grotesque body subversively, employing it to celebrate the material dimension of existence, to interrogate and critique the mysoginistic image of the monstrous feminine and to resignify the boundaries of the abject. The motif is relevant not only to her portrayal of character but also to her treatment of narrative and imagery. It finds expression in her use of imagery and narrative, as well as informing the intertextual aspect of her writing.

Introduction: Winterson and the Grotesque

The representations of the grotesque body in the fiction of Jeanette Winterson are inventive and diverse. The majority, it is interesting to note, belong to women, endorsing Mary Russo's observation that the grotesque, though appearing to be ungendered, is, in fact, generally associated with the feminine (9-13). In support of this, Russo cites Mikhail Bakhtin's reference to the Kerch terracotta figurines of the "senile, pregnant hags" (25-26) that embody his concept of the grotesque. She draws attention to the ambivalence of the image for the feminist reader, describing it as "loaded with all of the connotations of fear and loathing associated with the biological processes of reproduction and of aging" (219). She also investigates the metaphorical connections between the concept of the grotesque and the grotesque cave or grotto evoking the cavernous female body and the relationship with the earthy, material dimension of existence to which phallocentric culture has traditionally relegated woman. Another factor, Russo claims, that serves to relate the grotesque to the feminine is the marginalised position that it occupies when defined, as is frequently the case, against the norm of the "classical." While she does not discount the representation of the

male body as grotesque and, in fact, includes several examples of it in her study, she argues that it receives this designation chiefly by association with the female as signifying "the body marked by difference" (13).

The depictions of the female grotesque that appear in Winterson's fiction take a variety of different forms. A particularly intriguing one is Villanelle, the heroine of *The Passion* (1987), whose curiously webbed feet transform her into a hybrid creature with animal or, more precisely, bird-like features. Then there is the Dog Woman, the protagonist of *Sexing the Cherry* (1989), whose gigantic stature and immense strength win her fame, though more often notoriety, with her seventeenth-century contemporaries. A third, more poignant example, is Louise, the object of the narrator's romantic infatuation in *Written on Body* (1992). She is portrayed contracting leukaemia and, as a result, her body turns traitor, attacking itself: "The white T-cells have turned bandit. They are swarming into the bloodstream. [...] It used to be their job to keep her body safe from enemies on the outside. Now they are the enemies on the inside" (115). As a result, her body, as the narrator describes, is unexpectedly transformed from something familiar and sensual to a "foreign body" (116). These three characters, along with their representation and their relationship to the concept of the grotesque, form the focus of this essay. I shall discuss them in the context of feminist and postmodern theory with reference to the ideas of Julia Kristeva, Barbara Creed, and Judith Butler.

The motif of the grotesque body comprises, in fact, a cluster of ideas, which, though connected, merit individual analysis. The emphatic physicality of the motif and its preoccupation with body image relate it to the material dimension of existence characterised by sexuality, growth, decay and death. In contrast to the classical body, which is conventionally depicted as closed and monumental, the grotesque body is represented as open and excessive, exuberantly delighting in the senses. It is also abject, in that it deviates from the norm and signifies a site of transgression. Julia Kristeva defines the abject as "[w]hat disturbs identity, system, order" and refuses to "respect boundaries, positions, rules" (4). The grotesque body, in its links with the deformed and the degraded and its tendency to overlap borders and become "blended with the world, with animals, with objects" (27), agrees with this definition. In addition, its association with Otherness and monstrosity connects it to the foreign and the alien. And, in its ability to change shape and shift from the familiar to the unfamiliar, it relates to the Freudian concept of the uncanny (217-53). All these different significations and resonances are relevant to Winterson's fiction and the images of the female grotesque that it inscribes.

The motif of the grotesque body is sometimes utilised oppressively in fiction, with the effect of endorsing the concept of "the monstrous feminine" (1-7) and

relegating women, homosexuals and other devalued or stigmatised subjects to the domain of the abject. However, it can also be used subversively to validate the material dimension of existence and reclaim marginality and difference. In this respect it has the ability to challenge patriarchal and homophobic perspectives and empower the oppressed and the marginalised. Winterson employs it in this manner. By introducing a note of postmodern parody and employing strategies of play and fantasy, she recasts the motif with the effect of resignifying the abject and celebrating female and lesbian difference. She interrogates and problematises the misogynistic image of the monstrous feminine, thus challenging and transforming hetero-patriarchal discourses.

The concept of the grotesque is relevant, it is interesting to note, not only to the representation of the characters that people Winterson's novels but also to her treatment of textuality and narrative. As well as portraying Villanelle, the Dog Woman, and Louise in terms of grotesque imagery, Winterson, by introducing digressions and juxtaposing different voices, foregrounds the grotesque and eccentric nature of their histories and the narratives inscribing them. *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* are both examples of historic metafiction, a genre particularly associated with the grotesque. Critics working in the field of feminist historical studies, such as Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn, comment on the fragmented and discontinuous character of women's histories and foreground the contradictions of power/powerlessness, heroism/oppression that they frequently display. They investigate the interplay between the private and public spheres of family and society, work and home, that informs the history of the female subject, and highlight the need to regard "women, not as victims of oppression, as passive spectators of the drama of history, but as having an influence and a history of their own" (17). Winterson similarly emphasises the fractured and contradictory nature of women's history and the narratives inscribing it, utilising a number of different strategies to achieve this. She foregrounds the difficulty of distinguishing between historical and literary discourses, fact and fiction, and depicts the one merging into the other. She creates narratives that, instead of being linear and straightforward, are labyrinthine and eccentric. As well as interweaving a multiplicity of voices, they are intercepted and disrupted by episodes of fantasy and magic realism.

Written on the Body, the third of Winterson's novels I shall discuss, though set in the present and not a work of historiographic metafiction, also employs a discourse that is fractured and eccentric. The stream-of-consciousness narrative it comprises is fragmented by the introduction of complex conceits and intertextual allusions some of which, as we shall see, originate in the writing of seventeenth-century metaphysical poets and playwrights such as John Donne and John Webster. Evoking the narrator's shifting perspectives on Louise, they

vividly capture the dramatic shifts of emotion and viewpoint that typify this controversial novel.

The Passion: Webbed Feet, Cross-dressing and *Doppelgangers*

Like many postmodern novels, *The Passion* is strongly preoccupied with the rhetoric of storytelling, its pleasures and contradictions. As well as employing several subsidiary tales, it also introduces two major narratives. Henri's account of his upbringing in rural France and his experience in the service of Napoleon, whom initially he admires as the "most powerful man in the world" (13), interrelates with the narrative of Villanelle and her ill-fated love affair with the Queen of Spades. Both narratives introduce reference to the grotesque body. In the later stages of the novel, Henri, alerted to the horrors of war by the carnage he has witnessed on the battle field, rejects his former devotion to Napoleon and feels himself to be haunted by the dismembered bodies of massacred soldiers returning to the land of the living to seek retribution. Introducing an image of the grotesque body at its most horrific, he describes himself "covered in dead men" and comments hysterically on "the madness of arms and legs that pushed in at my ears and my throat" (25). His fantasies, as well as involving him in the spectral world of the uncanny, also relate him to the abject. Kristeva describes the corpse as "the utmost of abjection" (4). She points out that it lacks a soul and is, in biblical terms, a signifier of pollution. The images of the mutilated corpses that Henri sees in his imagination infect his psyche in a similar manner; they cause him to lose contact with the present and descend into a world of mental disturbance. The ghost of the deceased Napoleon visits him, pathetically enquiring if he still loves him. Oppressed by this morbid fantasy, Henri continues, as he grimly puts it, to encounter "the dead walking the halls and watching me with their hollow eyes" (142).

Villanelle's relationship with the motif of the grotesque body, as suits her role as the signifier of lesbian desire, takes a very different form. Winterson's radical recasting of certain pejorative stereotypes traditionally applied to the lesbian in her portrayal of Villanelle is illuminated by reference to the observations of Barbara Creed. Creed points out that, whereas all women tend to be associated with the grotesque, there is one particular category of woman that is regarded as more grotesque than others. This is, of course, the lesbian. Creed cites three grotesque images that homophobic culture conventionally projects upon her: the animalistic, the masculine and the narcissistic double (86-103). Winterson's portrayal of Villanelle, in fact, inventively reworks all three. Her webbed feet, a feature of her anatomy that she inherits from her father and critics read as a signifier of her sexual difference (112), relate her to the animal. They also link her to mythical female figures with monstrous bodies associated

with water, such as the mermaid. The boy's dress that she wears while working at the Venice Casino, as well carrying carnivalesque connotations, connects her with the masculine. In the course of the narrative she even acquires an uncanny double. This is the mysterious unnamed woman with ghoulishly phosphorescent hair ornamented with a crown of rats" tails whom she encounters while rowing on the Venetian canal (74,114).

Villanelle's webbed feet, to which we are introduced at the start of her narrative, position her as transgressive since they carry demonic and perverse connotations. Marina Warner observes that the devil and his minions are sometimes depicted in medieval art with webbed feet and, commenting on representations of witches and succubi, describes webbed feet as "a recurrent sign of contrariness and, in women, of deviancy" (121).

Villanelle's deviancy is also illustrated by the pleasure she takes in different forms of inversion, both other people's and her own. While working at the Casino she enjoys adopting male drag and, on crossing St Marks Square during carnival, expresses admiration for the acts of daring, sexual as well as gymnastic, performed by the acrobats. She describes how,

> acrobats swing over the square, casting grotesque shadows on the dancers below. Now and again, one will dangle by the knees and snatch a kiss from whoever is standing below. I like such kisses. They fill the mouth and leave the body free. To kiss well one must kiss solely. (59)

The inverted position that the acrobats adopt recalls Mikhail Bakhtin's description of carnivalesque antics and the challenge they signify to orthodox values. He describes how, in a typically carnivalesque stance, "the essential topographical element of the bodily hierarchy [is] turned upside down; the lower stratum replaces the upper stratum" (309). The positions adopted by the acrobats also anticipate and operate as a metaphor for Villanelle's love affair with the Queen of Spades which resembles them in being precarious, illicit and sexually exciting. In order to conceal both her webbed feet and the fact that she is a woman, she adopts complicated, stylised positions in her lovemaking and focuses exclusively on the mouth:

> And so, from the first, we separated our pleasure. She [the Queen of Spades] lay on the rug and I lay at right angles to her so that only our lips might meet. Kissing in this way is the strangest of distractions. The greedy body that clamours for satisfaction is forced to content itself with a single sensation and, just as the blind hear more acutely and the deaf can feel the grass grow, so the mouth becomes the focus of love and all things pass through it and are re-defined. It is a sweet and precise torture. (67)

As well as associating Villanelle with the animalistic and the masculine, Winterson also, as mentioned above, assigns her a double. The grotesque-looking woman with three fingers on one hand, whose filthy appearance and weirdly phosphorescent hair give her "the appearance of a subterranean devil" (114), has created a make-shift home for herself in a nook in one of the darker canals. Here she hosts imaginary dinner parties, entertaining invisible guests to supper with strips of rancid meat. She belongs to an aristocratic family and resembles Villanelle in being a hybrid figure, mingling the socially acceptable with the abject. Villanelle describes her as an exile, connecting her with the foreigners and outcasts who people the derelict "inner city" of Venice (74). She also links her to the uncanny, to "the spirits of the dead" who haunt the city of Venice "speaking in tongues" (75).

However, Winterson, it is important to note, does not employ these three pejorative stereotypes of the lesbian in a homophobic or misogynistic manner. She recasts them in a spirit of postmodern and queer parody to expose the effects of bigotry and to celebrate, not stigmatise, lesbian difference. Parody plays a key role in postmodern and feminist discourses. Luce Irigaray discusses the strategies available to women to elude "the feminine masquerade" (133), the set of male-defined scripts which phallocentric culture expects them to perform. She recommends that, since women cannot reject these scripts outright, they should instead employ, to cite her term, the strategy of "mimesis" (76). Playing with mimesis, Irigaray argues, enables the female subject to parodically mimic conventional scripts and roles and, by introducing an element of excess in her performance, expose their inauthenticity.

Winterson employs a similarly parodic strategy in her portrayal of Villanelle and the grotesque features she ascribes to her. Rather than depicting her heroine's webbed feet as monstrous and ugly, she, on the contrary, foregrounds their delicacy and attraction. Although Villanelle generally keeps them hidden, Henri is privileged to catch a glimpse of them. He describes how "she unfolds them like a fan and folds them in on themselves in the same way" and admits, "I wanted to touch them" (136). On another occasion they are represented serving a practical function. They enable Villanelle, as the astonished Henri describes, to transcend the laws of gravity and walk on water, dragging the evidence of the murder he has committed from the scene of the crime:

> We were moving. How?
> I raised my head fully, my knees still drawn up, and saw Villanelle,
> her back towards me, a rope over her shoulder, walking on the canal and
> dragging our boats. (129)

The comparison with Christ that this portrayal evokes, as well as reflecting Villanelle's importance to Henri as the object of his passion, paradoxically both

echoes and subversively parodies the Saviour's role. Whereas Christ walked upon the sea to comfort his disciples and save them from the contrary wind impeding their oars (Mark 6: 48-51), Villanelle walks on the canal in an attempt to save her friend from being discovered and punished as a murderer.

Winterson also treats subversively the masculine role-play in which Villanelle engages, as becomes apparent if we read it in the context of the ideas of the queer theorist Judith Butler. Butler adapts Irigaray's concept of "playing with mimesis" as a strategy of resistance for lesbians and gay men to employ. She argues that butch/femme and drag roles, and the cross-dressing they involve, are no mere imitation of the heterosexual real. She claims that, on the contrary, they "bring into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original" and, by demonstrating "that heterosexuality only constitutes itself as the original through a convincing act of repetition," enable identity to become "a site of contest and revision" (19, 23). This is the case with Villanelle. Her wearing of male drag at the Casino, as well as associating her with the carnivalesque, prompts her to interrogate the concept of an essential self and to recognise the inauthenticity of all gender roles. She questions, "What was myself? Was this breeches and boots self any less real than my [feminine] garters?" (66).

The *doppelganger* that Villanelle acquires, the woman with a crown of rats' tails whom she encounters on the canal, is likewise reworked and transformed. Instead of signifying the narcissism which the lesbian subject has traditionally been accused of embodying, she carries connotations of the spectral and the uncanny. She materialises at crisis points in Villanelle's life, uttering warnings couched in riddlingly sibylline phrases. Villanelle, dignifying her by the title of "my philosopher friend" (74), regards her, in fact, not as a narcissistic mirror image but as a spectral messenger with occult powers. Distinguished by her macabre crown of rats tails and the ghostly supper parties she hosts, the woman can be interpreted, I suggest, as a darkly parodic image of Carnival festivity. Alternatively, we may interpret her grotesque appearance and weird behaviour as representing the image of the monstrous feminine that patriarchal society assigns to woman/lesbian. She haunts the city of Venice in a manner similar to that in which, as Terry Castle (27-33) and Diana Fuss (1-10) comment, the presence of the lesbian, despite being repressed and stigmatised as abject, persistently haunts hetero-patriarchal culture.

Sexing the Cherry: Monstrous Bodies, Grafting and Fairy Tales

Postmodern strategies of parody are also to the fore in Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry*. The novel, set in the seventeeth-century, interrelates a number of different generic conventions, including picaresque narrative, romance,

seafarer's yarn and fairy tale. It interweaves two different narratives: the Dog Woman's story relating her experiences in seventeenth-century London, and the tale recounted by her adopted son Jordan, who is portrayed exploring both geographical terrain and the realm of the imagination. The narratives of the two characters, while differing in location and significance, both introduce imagery relating to the grotesque body.

Like Villanelle, the Dog Woman, as her name indicates, is associated with the animalistic. However, in contrast to Villanelle who generally manages to conceal her grotesquely webbed feet, the Dog Woman's monstrosity is visible for all and sundry to see. As a result, she is typecast as degraded. As she herself admits, "My nose is flat, my eyebrows are heavy. I have only a few teeth and those are a poor show, being black and broken. I had smallpox when I was a girl and the caves in my face are home enough for fleas" (24). Conscious of the fact that, despite her "fine blue eyes that see in the dark," her countenance does not conform to the feminine image, she asks herself the painful question, "How hideous am I?" (24).

However, it is the Dog Woman's gigantic stature which, even more than her face, separates her from fellow-citizens. It makes her an object of ridicule or fear, giving Winterson the opportunity not only to expose the prejudice encountered by women whose body image fails to conform to the feminine ideal but also to resignify the boundaries of the abject. By giving the Dogwoman a subjectivity and voice and representing her renegotiating and challenging the image of the monstrous feminine, she transforms her from the role of victim to a signifier of female empowerment.

The Dogwoman has harsh experience of the misogynistic response and abusive epithets that her appearance attracts. The appellation "Dog Woman," she explains, is not of her own choosing. While ostensibly denoting her profession as a dog-breeder, it reflects, on a deeper level, society's bigoted response to what it regards as her grotesque image. Her father, regarding her as malformed and fit only to entertain the general public, sold her to a freak show when she was a child. And, as she sardonically observes, she does not go to church on Sundays but obeys the priest's injunction that "gargoyles must remain on the outside" (14).

The Dogwoman seldom washes and when, on one exceptional occasion, she decides to do so, "creeping towards the pump at dead of night like a ghoul to a tomb" (35), it is with the aim of pleasing a prospective lover. However, the romantic encounter is unsuccessful. On clasping her suitor to her breast to kiss him, she is surprised to see him faint. When she subsequently enquires, "Is it love that affects you so?" she is disappointed to receive the unflattering reply "It is terror" (36).

However, instead of collapsing under the weight of the hostility she encounters, the Dog Woman manipulates the image of monstrosity that her fellow citizens ascribe to her, defiantly utilising it for purposes of self-assertion.

In carnivalesque mode she employs her immense strength to toss an elephant in the air while, on a more serious level, she wages a war against the repressive effects of Puritanism. She proudly admits to picking up male Puritans, her avowed enemies, by the scruff of the neck, "the way a terrier does a rat" (88). Winterson's complex treatment of the Dogwoman's subjectivity, combined with her exuberant depiction of her physical exploits, transforms her from an image of monstrosity to a signifier of female heroism.

Jordan's narrative develops the hybrid aspect of the grotesque body. He accompanies John Tradescant, the royal gardener, on his voyages abroad to "stock up with seeds and pods and any exotic thing that might take the fancy of the English" (78). By observing his work on the cherry, he also learns from him the art of grafting, describing it as "the means whereby a plant, perhaps tender and uncertain, is fused into a hardier member of the strain, and so the two produce a third kind, without seed or parent" (78). Though recognising that Church condemns the practice, along with cross-dressing and homosexuality, as unnatural, he transgressively wonders if "it was an art I might apply to myself ?" (78). This is, in fact, the course he takes, dressing up as a woman in an attempt to explore the female world and to deconstruct the binary division masculine/feminine. However, since he is unfamiliar with the emotional subtleties of female interpersonal relations, he admits to feeling like "a traveller in a foreign country" (31).

Henri's subsequent encounter with the Twelve Dancing Princesses and the stories they tell give him a further insight into gender and sexual orientation. In contrast to the version of the fairy tale recounted by the brothers Grimm, the princesses are assigned individual subjectivities and voices and are permitted to recount their own narratives. And, instead of describing themselves living happily ever after with their husbands in marital bliss, they expose the oppressive aspects of matrimony, giving what is, from a hetero-patriarchal viewpoint, a grotesque account of marriage. Reference to the "the monstrous-feminine" plays a key role in their accounts. Rapunzel, for example, echoing the Dog Woman's reference to the misogynistic origins of her name, describes the readiness of homophobic culture to typecast as a witch any woman who rejects compulsory heterosexuality. She describes how, in contrast to Grimm's account, she was not imprisoned in a tower by a wicked witch but chose to live there of her own free-will with her lesbian partner. Her partner did not identify as a witch. On the contrary, it was Rapunzel's family and the prince they intended she should marry who, consumed with homophobic hatred, typecast her as one. The sealing of the door to the tower that, in Grimms' version, the witch employs to keep Rapunzel prisoner, becomes in Winterson's an act of self-defence performed by the lesbian couple. It is, however, unsuccessful. The story ends on a violent note with the prince forging an entry into the tower and brutally murdering Rapunzel's partner.

Written on the Body: Foreign and Sepulchral Bodies

Written on the Body offers the reader a very different kind of narrative from both *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*. Unlike the two earlier novels, it is set in the present and, instead of utilising several different narrators and introducing episodes of magic realism or fairytale digressions, inscribes a contemporary romance plot recounted by a single narrator. The representations of the grotesque body it introduces chiefly take the form of the multifaceted images that the narrator projects on his beloved Louise.

It is, in fact, Winterson's treatment of the narrator, in particular her refusal to disclose her/his gender, that is the hub of the critical debate that the novel has aroused (89-93). Winterson's decision to keep the narrator's gender ambiguous is, in my view, no mere gimmick, but serves an important ideological function. Developing the interest in interrogating and problematising the binary masculine/feminine that she evinces in her earlier novels, it interrogates and subverts the division of homosexuality/heterosexuality. It agrees, in this respect, with the aims of queer politics. Commenting on the contradictory relationship that exists between heterosexual/homosexual and foregrounding their interrelation, Jonathan Dollimore observes, "Culture exists in a relationship of difference with the alien, which is also a relationship of fundamental, antagonistic interdependence. What is constructed as absolutely other is, in fact, inextricably related – most obviously in terms of binary opposition" (22). Dollimore cites the texts of Oscar Wilde and Jean Genet as successfully subverting the binary opposites hetero/homo. I propose that we add Winterson's *Written on the Body* to these texts since it, too, achieves this feat.

However, whereas some critics praise Winterson's novel as radical, others, on the contrary, find fault with her approach to sexual politics. Do the numerous descriptions of Louise's body, grotesque and otherwise, that litter the text merely replicate heterosexual paradigms of conquest by reducing woman to the role of passive object or do they recognise female subjectivity and agency? Cath Stowers, in her perceptive discussion of the novel, raises this critique, only to reject it (99). She argues that, on the contrary, the relationship between the narrator and Louise tends to be depicted as reciprocal, citing as evidence the narrator's jubilant remark, "We were insultingly happy. A treasure had fallen into our hands and the treasure was each other" (99).

In my opinion, Winterson's depictions of the female body vary considerably throughout the text regarding the sexual politics they inscribe. This is exemplified by her treatment of one particularly significant image of the grotesque body: the traditional trope of the female body depicted in imagery of landscape and nature. In fact, she goes out of her way to advertise its importance by portraying the narrator rhetorically enquiring, "What other

places are there in the world than those discovered on a lover's body?" (82). Some of her recastings of the trope are conventionally masculinist in viewpoint, portraying the narrator as explorer and spectator, and relegating Louise to the domain of inanimate nature. This is illustrated by the narrator's celebration of Louise's eroticism: "She smells of the sea. She smells of rock pools when I was a child. She keeps a starfish in there. I crouch down to smell the salt, to run my fingers round the rim. She opens and shuts like a sea anemone. She's refilled each day with fresh tides of longing" (73).

In other passages, however, Winterson problematises images of hetero-patriarchal objectification and conquest. By introducing an element of excess and advertising the source of her description, in this case Donne's Elegy "To his Mistris going to Bed" with its strip-tease depiction of the woman disrobing and the famous address "Oh my America, my new founde lande" (15), she exposes the oddity and grotesqueness of the representation of the female body as territory. The narrator, on contemplating the beloved, admits, "Louise, your nakedness was too complete for me, who had not learned the extent of your fingers. How could I cover this land? Did Columbus feel like this on sighting the Americas?" (52). Winterson concludes the passage by inverting the narrator's apparent intent to colonise Louise's body and, unexpectedly positioning her/him as the passive partner in the relationship, portrays her/him remarking: "I had no dreams to possess you but I wanted you to possess me" (52).

Winterson takes a similarly unorthodox course in her treatment of another trope that she inherits from Donne: the metaphorical representation of the body as literary text exemplified in the lines, "Love's mysteries in soules doe grow, / But yet the body is his booke" in "The Exstasie" (61). Her reworking of the motif again inverts conventional gender positions since it portrays Louise, the beloved, as reader and the body of the lover-narrator as text. The lover-narrator, unwilling to reveal himself to Louise's exploratory hands, observes that:

> Written on the body is a secret code only visible in certain lights: the accumulations of a lifetime gather there. In places the palimpsest is so heavily worked that the letters feel like braille. I like to keep my body rolled up away from prying eyes. Never unfold too much, tell the whole story. I didn't know that Louise would have reading hands. She has translated me into her own book. (89)

In another passage Louise's hands invade the narrator's body even more drastically. They are metaphorically transformed, in a manner resembling Franz Kafka's short story "The Penal Colony" (145-66), to instruments of torture. The narrator complains, "Who taught you to use your hands as branding irons? You have scored your name into my shoulders, referenced me with your mark" (89).

With the advent of Louise's leukaemia, imagery of the body as landscape or literary text ceases to dominate the novel and is replaced by metaphors of military conflict representing the way that her body starts macabrely to destroy itself. As the narrator remarks, commenting on the uncanny way in which the cells that are expected to keep the body safe have become instruments of destruction, the homely and familiar have become hostile, "The security forces have rebelled. Louise is the victim of a coup (115). Her body is, as a result, transformed into "a foreign body," alien to both herself and other people.

On learning of Louise's illness, her lover, in fact, enters an uncanny world where the familiar has become unfamiliar: "The laws of motion are suspended. [...] There is nothing here that I recognise" (100). The observation s/he voices as the cancer develops, "The body is making way for worms" (119), evokes the universal processes of mortality and physical decay of which Louise has become the victim. As well as echoing the Shakespearean line, "men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love" (*As You Like It*, 4.1.95-96), cited by Winterson herself, the image also picks up Bosola's words "Thou art a box of worm-seed" which he addresses to the eponymous heroine of John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (4.2.114) on her death. The novel concludes with the narrator condemned, as s/he acknowledges, to "living on my memories like a cheap has-been" (124), as she contemplates the beloved's "sepulchral body" (123).

As illustrated above, the motif of the grotesque body plays a key role in Winterson's fiction, assuming a variety of different forms and manifestations. The novels I have discussed radically develop and recast a number of different versions of the motif, familiar from literature and art. Foremost among these are the motif's associations with the abject, reflected in its rejection of convention and its propensity to disturb order and identity; its links with carnivalesque excess and the celebration of the senses; and the connections it displays with the hybrid and the monstrous, particularly in relation to femininity. Winterson also develops the motif's connotations of deviant sexuality, utilising them to explore and problematise the binary oppositions masculine/feminine, and homosexual/heterosexual. In addition, she reworks its relation to the uncanny and the domain of mortality and death. These different concepts and resonances interrelate throughout her fiction, challenging hetero-patriarchal discourses, resignifying the boundaries of the abject, and celebrating female and lesbian difference.

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