



You have downloaded a document from
RE-BUŚ
repository of the University of Silesia in Katowice

Title: "Take off your clothes. Take off your body" : transgressing gender in Jeanette Winterson's fiction

Author: Sonia Front

Citation style: Front Sonia. (2008). "Take off your clothes. Take off your body" : transgressing gender in Jeanette Winterson's fiction. W: P. Dziedzic, M. Nitka (red.), "Fire and ice : the dialectic of order and chaos" (S. 66-77). Katowice : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.



Uznanie autorstwa - Użycie niekomercyjne - Bez utworów zależnych Polska - Licencja ta zezwala na rozpowszechnianie, przedstawianie i wykonywanie utworu jedynie w celach niekomercyjnych oraz pod warunkiem zachowania go w oryginalnej postaci (nie tworzenia utworów zależnych).



UNIWERSYTET ŚLĄSKI
W KATOWICACH



Biblioteka
Uniwersytetu Śląskiego



Ministerstwo Nauki
i Szkolnictwa Wyższego

Sonia Front

“Take off your clothes. Take off your body” Transgressing Gender in Jeanette Winterson’s Fiction

Jeanette Winterson’s characters are anxious to be liberated from the burdens of their gender since gender entails the attribution of social roles, appearance, behaviour and sexual orientation. Gender is treated as one of the constituents of identity; yet, Winterson’s characters refuse to be labelled on this ground. Consequently, they strive to reconceptualize their identity, which takes place through redefinition of the body. Their journey of self-discovery is accomplished through transgression violating the traditional boundaries of binary opposites and turning them into chaos. With a view to freeing her characters of the yokes of gender, Winterson deconstructs their gender or makes them contravene boundaries. The concern of the paper is to discuss the ways in which it takes place.

Refusing to choose between the dichotomies, Winterson conjoins them instead, approving both in each pair contemporaneously.¹ This is reflected in the symbol of an orange and Jeanette’s alter egos in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* as well as in Winterson’s androgynous characters. One of them is Venice in *The Passion* enacted as a feminine uncanny city liberated from any rules of fixity. The borders of binary oppositions are incessantly infringed upon here so as to create an abject mixture,² echoing Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice* and Italo Calvino’s *Invisible Cities* and similar to that indicated by Mikhail Bakhtin

¹ LAUREN RUSK, “The Refusal of Otherness. Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*,” in: *The Life Writing of Otherness: Woolf, Baldwin, Kingston & Winterson* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), p. 121.

² JUDITH SEABOYER, “Second Death in Venice: Romanticism and the Compulsion to Repeat in Jeanette Winterson’s *The Passion*,” in: *Contemporary Literature*, Fall 1997 v38 n3, p. 484.

in his concept of the carnivalesque. Dissolution of boundaries is also characteristic of the floating city in Winterson’s *Sexing the Cherry*, in which the buildings have no floors (displaying similarity to the city of Armilla in Calvino’s *Invisible Cities*) as gravity has deserted the place.

The city of Venice demonstrates its two faces. The first one is the visible mercurial maze of canals, demarcated by the sea and penetrated by water. The London Spitalfields in *The PowerBook* are also rendered as an amphibious maze of streets where “[t]he noise of the river is nearby, but the water itself is unseen. It is as though the water is everywhere and nowhere, perhaps under the streets, perhaps inside the houses, with their watery windows where the old glass reflects the light.”³ Venice, the “living city” abundant in surprises, is impossible to be learnt as things change here, developing into other things, therefore “your bloodhound nose will not serve you here. Your course in compass reading will fail you. Your confident instructions to passers-by will send them to squares they have never heard of, over canals not listed in the notes.”⁴ The same happens in the city which Jordan in *Sexing the Cherry* visits during one of his voyages — its buildings “are never in the same place from one day to the next,”⁵ which is the embodiment of the inhabitants’ longing to be attached to one place and to abandon it. The gallery of odd places is completed by Silver’s house in Salts in *Lighthousekeeping*. The slanted house, where the chairs are nailed to the floor and only food that sticks to the plate must be eaten, is cut into a steep slope to assault any rules of fixity.

The inhabitants of Venice yield to pleasure, losing themselves in a continuous carnivalesque fête and displaying propensity to games of chance. They are passionate people, “conversant with the nature of greed and desire, holding hands with the Devil and God,”⁶ not afraid to take risks, therefore Venice constitutes “an enchanted island for the mad, the rich, the bored, the perverted.”⁷ In this dimension Venice is similar to Lawrence Durrell’s Alexandria which represents, among others, the fever of sexual freedom, rich in “variety and profusion,” where “[t]he symbolic lovers of free Hellenic world are replaced ... by something different, something androgynous, inverted upon itself”⁸; Alexandria whose temperament is demonstrated in the characters’ thoughts and actions. Wintersonian Venice appears “the city of disguises”⁹ as well as its dwellers: “There are women of every kind and not all of them are

³ JEANETTE WINTERSON, *The PowerBook* (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 165.

⁴ JEANETTE WINTERSON, *The Passion* (London: Vintage, 2004), p. 49.

⁵ JEANETTE WINTERSON, *Sexing the Cherry* (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 42.

⁶ WINTERSON, *Sexing ...*, p. 57.

⁷ WINTERSON, *Sexing ...*, p. 52.

⁸ LAWRENCE DURRELL, *Alexandria Quartet. Justine* (New York: Pocket Books, 1961), p. 4.

⁹ WINTERSON, *Sexing ...*, p. 56.

women.”¹⁰ Also Aschenbach in *Death in Venice* submits to the charm of the city of masquerade and puts on a mask of make-up which is supposed to rejuvenate him. The negative portrayal of Italians in *Death in Venice* enhances the image of the city as a place of deceit, artifice and moral decay. Eros is juxtaposed with Thanatos here; carnival with death, signalled by funeral gondolas sailing under the cover of the night to the cemetery.

The other face of Venice is “the city within the city,” “the inner city”¹¹ known only by boatmen. It constitutes a fluctuation of meanings and border transgressions forming a labyrinth, a rheumy space of lability and peril that represents psychic inward journey.¹² The journey aims at discovering one’s identity through interior exploration “along the blood vessels” and coming “to the cities of the interior”¹³ which are not marked on any map. Both faces of Venice, defined by water and penetrated by it, contribute to a metacity which is a ground for ambivalence coded in the female body and theories of urbanity, and which becomes the mirror for the reformulations of gender, human violence¹⁴ and identity.

The flux of the androgynous city reverberates in the protagonist, Villanelle, her name alluding to an elaborate poetic form characterized by regular repetition of lines, like Villanelle’s stories interwoven in her narrative, or like mazes in the city. Her body crosses over the boundaries of binary opposites, too, her identity being fickle for it is a conflation of a man and a woman, a human and animal, and the double identification is encoded in her body and sexual orientation. She is endowed with webbed feet, a feature characteristic of boatmen, thanks to which they can walk on water. The masculine feet constitute “a kind of cultural fantasy, a phallic signifier of secret power”¹⁵ which must never be disclosed so as not to challenge the epistemic order. But her feet are also bird-like: “She unfolds them like a fan and folds them in on themselves in the same way.”¹⁶ In her bird-likeness she resembles Fevvers in Angela Carter’s *Nights at the Circus*, a woman with no navel, hatched from an egg and possessing wings. Villanelle’s body is as amphibious as Venice’s.

Since a girl is not welcome in many professions, and Villanelle cannot perform her dreamt job of a boatwoman because of her sex, she cross-dresses to work in the Casino. The appearance of a boy is required there but the foreign pleasure-seekers do not identify it with the male sex: “It was part of the game, trying to decide which sex was hidden behind tight breeches and

¹⁰ WINTERSON, *Sexing ...*, p. 58.

¹¹ WINTERSON, *Sexing ...*, p. 53.

¹² SEABOYER, “Second Death ...,” p. 485.

¹³ WINTERSON, *The Passion*, p. 68.

¹⁴ SEABOYER, “Second Death ...,” p. 485.

¹⁵ SEABOYER, “Second Death ...,” p. 501.

¹⁶ WINTERSON, *The Passion*, p. 136.

extravagant face-paste."¹⁷ Through the disguise Villanelle destabilizes the consistency of sex, gender and coherent self: "what was myself? Was this breeches and boots self any less real than my garters? What was it about me that interested her? You play you win. You play you lose. You play."¹⁸ Yet, the feet reduce the gender masquerade merely to a game — Villanelle pretends that she is a man but in fact she is a hermaphrodite and thus she can choose to be either a man or a woman in the eyes of the world¹⁹ that demands the order of one sex at a time and receives the undifferentiated with the mixture of horror and fascination, as Bataille and Kristeva argue.²⁰ A hermaphrodite would be treated as abject since abjection is evoked by "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" that combines both polarized notions.²¹ The gender play becomes thereby Villanelle's hiding-place since the revelation of her masculine feature would result in a more radical disturbance of gender boundaries.²²

It is at the Casino where Villanelle meets the woman in a mask and falls in love with her. The Queen of spades takes her for a man, which causes Villanelle's anxiety: "She thought I was a young man. I was not. Should I go to see her as myself and joke about the mistake and leave gracefully? My heart shrivelled at this thought. To lose her again so soon."²³ However, the risk-taking and fear of discovery and possible loss become the source of Villanelle's erotic tension, and her passion is partly contingent upon them²⁴: "Every game threatens a wild card. The unpredictable, the out of control. Even with a steady hand and a crystal ball we couldn't rule the world the way we wanted it. There are storms at sea and there are other storms inland. Only the convent windows look serenely out on both."²⁵ Fear of revelation results in the passion for Villanelle kisses the Queen to divert her attention from the disguise. The fear vanishes when the Queen has guessed Villanelle's gender, and what follows is not rejection but sex: "I went back to her house and banged on the door. She opened it a little. She looked surprised. 'I'm a woman,' I said, lifting up my shirt and risking the catarrh. She smiled. 'I know.' I didn't go home. I stay-

¹⁷ WINTERSON, *The Passion*, p. 54.

¹⁸ WINTERSON, *The Passion*, pp. 65—66.

¹⁹ ALLEN, "Jeanette Winterson ...," p. 55.

²⁰ After BARBARA CREED, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 10.

²¹ JULIA KRISTEVA, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia UP, 1982), p. 4.

²² KRISTEVA, *Powers of Horror ...*, p. 4.

²³ WINTERSON, *The Passion*, p. 65.

²⁴ ALLEN, "Jeanette Winterson ...," pp. 54, 57.

²⁵ WINTERSON, *The Passion*, p. 71.

ed."²⁶ The Queen's passion depends thus on gender ambiguity entailing the pleasure of the viewer that leads to decoding, but also on constructing barriers and wielding power over her lover²⁷: "Does she do this often? Does she walk the streets, when her husband goes away, looking for someone like me? ... Does she invite them to supper and hold them with her eyes and explain, a little sadly, that she can't make love? Perhaps this is her passion. Passion out of passion obstacles."²⁸ Villanelle's need for the unpredictable and the Queen's need for control are satisfied by the doubly taboo affair — homosexual and extramarital.

Although the Queen of spades seems to reciprocate Villanelle's passion, she does not resign from her marriage and, subsequently, Villanelle undertakes a desperate step of getting married to a man she disgusts and despises. She takes advantage of his fortune to travel round the world, and in return she is expected to carry on dressing as a boy for her husband's sexual pleasure. However, after some time she returns to the maternal city for, like all Venetians, she has a Siamese soul — she and the city are part of each other and reflected in each other. Villanelle's mutability of disguises corresponds with the city's; her identity is as incoherent and fluent as Venice's.

"The inner city" seems to stand for the soul, the heart, the identity whose "geography is uncertain,"²⁹ and thus it cannot be discovered by means of any guiding principles. The instructions and maps of the city will lead one astray, as well as the stereotypical determinants of identity, such as appearance, sex, or sexual orientation. Contradicting them, Winterson shows that one cannot determine a person's identity on the basis of them. Deconstructing gender proves that the person's identity does not change. Winterson's notion of the signifiers of identity seems congruent with Woolf's one in *Orlando* since "[t]he change of [Orlando's] sex ... did nothing whatever to alter their identity,"³⁰ whereas Angela Carter in *The Passion of New Eve* declares just the opposite. For her sex is an essential determinant of identity, therefore Evelyn changed into a woman feels trapped in a strange body: "When I looked in the mirror I saw Eve; I did not see myself. I saw a young woman who, though she was I, I could in no way acknowledge as myself."³¹

Venice is also a city visited in *Art & Lies* by Aschenbach's incarnation, seventy-year-old Cardinal and his ten-year-old lover, Handel, who give in to "purposeful pleasure."³² Winterson depicts love surpassing the restrictions of

²⁶ WINTERSON, *The Passion*, p. 71.

²⁷ ALLEN, "Jeanette Winterson ...," pp. 56–57.

²⁸ ALLEN, "Jeanette Winterson ...," pp. 56–57.

²⁹ ALLEN, "Jeanette Winterson ...," p. 68.

³⁰ VIRGINIA WOOLF, *Orlando* (London: Bloomsbury Classics, 1993), p. 96.

³¹ ANGELA CARTER, *The Passion of New Eve* (London: Virago, 1982), pp. 74–75.

³² JEANETTE WINTERSON, *Art & Lies* (London: Vintage, 1995), p. 199.

age and touches upon the controversial subject of children's sexuality. Demonstrating children's eroticism and the Cardinal's pedophilic preferences in no derogatory light aligns her with films directed by Todd Solondz. The objective of the couple's holiday is to submit Handel to the operation of being transformed into “a boy woman”³³ through “a small but decisive incision,” making him a perfect person, just like Madonna “who needed no man to make her complete,”³⁴ or Adam who became the male mother, or God: “Male and Female he created Them. And in His image.”³⁵ Handel and the Cardinal deem the operation as the act of putting a woman “back into man” and “[r]eturn[ing] to a man his femininity,”³⁶ making him an original Platonic androgyne. It also takes place when Marlene in *Boating for Beginners* undergoes the operation of changing sex from male to female, yet, on second thoughts, she wants her penis back, keeping the breasts.

Another strategy is castrating men. The Cardinal recollects the castrato, Cardinal Borghese's favourite, working as a prima donna in Rome, whom the whole town found very appealing and tempting. He was thereby a kind of drag queen, a phenomenon which Butler construes as an allegory of heterosexual melancholy over the loss of same-sex object of love, which must not be revealed or mourned in any other way accepted by the society: “It was obvious that he hoped to inspire the love of those who liked him as a man, and probably would not have done so as a woman.”³⁷ Various forms of drag then, Butler explains, fully overthrow “the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mock [...] both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity.” The possibility of imitating gender exposes it as imitative itself.³⁸ Cross-dressing appears to be a form of getting rid of the tension connected with keeping the social order; a kind of acceptable escape from the social role, which brings catharsis. Yet, it is also enticing as the spell drag queens cast originates from sexual vacillation, as Jean Baudrillard elucidates in *Seduction*. They love the game of signs and attempt “to seduce the signs themselves,” and sex in their case is a total, gestural, voluptuous and ritual game in which they turn everything into theatre and seduction. Moreover, it is easier for a non-woman to deploy the signs and “take seduction to the limit; and to engender fascination because of being more seductive than sexual.”³⁹ This sort of escape, entailing crossing the boundaries, is approved

³³ WINTERSON, *Art & Lies*, p. 194.

³⁴ WINTERSON, *Art & Lies*, p. 197.

³⁵ WINTERSON, *Art & Lies*, p. 198.

³⁶ WINTERSON, *Art & Lies*, pp. 195—196.

³⁷ WINTERSON, *Art & Lies*, p. 195.

³⁸ JUDITH BUTLER, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 137.

³⁹ JEAN BAUDRILLARD, *Seduction* (Montréal: New World Perspectives, 2001), pp. 12—13.

of particularly in Venice as here “What you are one day will not constrain you on the next. You may explore yourself freely, and if you have wit or wealth, no one will stand in your way.”⁴⁰ Here the characters in *Death in Venice*, *The Passion* and *Art & Lies* indulge in their repressed desires and surrender to their passionate drives, fluctuating from one sexual incarnation to another. A musical score of Richard Strauss’s *Der Rosenkavalier* closing *Art & Lies* underlines those fluctuations since opera is read as a symbol of queer art.

Death in Venice appears important to Silver, the protagonist of *Lighthousekeeping*, for she reads it passionately in the library and is tormented when the librarian borrows the book out of pure spite. It transpires that the book reflects Silver’s unconscious desire for as well as Gustav von Aschenbach, she turns out to be homosexual, and abandons herself to intense emotions, allowing to be ruled by passion and mixed dichotomies.

It is also an escape from the social role that forces Ali in *The PowerBook* to cross-dress as a boy. She is accustomed to it, living in disguise all her life, for another daughter would be a burden to her parents: “By the mystic laws of gender and economics, it ruins a peasant to place half of bowl of figs in front of his daughter, while his son may gorge on the whole tree, burn it for firewood and piss on the stump, and still be reckoned a blessing to his father.”⁴¹ Living in the patriarchal society, in which a human being is estimated on the basis of their body, and thus forced to cross-dress, Ali dissociates herself from her body: “But what if my body is the disguise? What if skin, bone, liver, veins, are the things I use to hide myself? I have put them on and I can’t take them off. Does that trap me or free me?”⁴² She does not feel her body to be the integral part of her self; to determine her identity since her body is not the expression of her personality, but adjusted to the society’s expectations. The detachment from her body, according to Ellyn Kaschack, results from the ambivalent sense of identity. The female corporeality is a construct which is supposed to be and not to be experienced at the same time. In consequence, a woman splits into parts and a range of identities emerges instead of one. Yet, none of them is the real one. The disintegration reveals the woman’s invisibility — she cannot be hurt as her oppressor does not know where she is.⁴³ In this sense Ali can read her body as both a trap and freedom. It appears a kind of disguise — disguises can change but the identity stays the same, just like in case of Orlando whose male body changes into the female one but whose self remains unaltered.

⁴⁰ WINTERSON, *The Passion*, p. 150.

⁴¹ WINTERSON, *The PowerBook*, p. 10.

⁴² WINTERSON, *The PowerBook*, p. 15.

⁴³ ELLYN KASCHACK, *Nowa psychologia kobiety* (Gdańsk: Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, 1996), pp. 96, 181.

When Ali is entrusted with the clandestine mission of delivering tulip bulbs to Holland, she conceals “a priceless pair of bulbs” of Lover’s Dream and Key of Pleasure species in “the same place as a priceless pair of balls”⁴⁴ with an embalmed stem in the middle to divert suspicions. In this way she becomes a man “by means of a little horticultural grafting.”⁴⁵ Sold by the pirates, Ali is assigned to be the Princess’s sex teacher before she gets married. As the Princess has never seen a naked man before, she is easily deceived by the tulip organs. However, while the Princess caresses the tulip, Ali’s “sensations grew exquisite” and, to her astonishment, she “felt [her] disguise come to life. The tulip began to stand.”⁴⁶ She appears not only drag then, but also androgynous.

The Princess probably realizes the masquerade on the subconscious level, similarly to the Queen of spades in *The Passion* but they both remain silent in fear of being rejected by others. The transgression is allowed then provided that nobody finds out about it,⁴⁷ as Bataille points out. Since the greatest bliss in love comes from the certainty that one behaves badly,⁴⁸ the characters’ fascination surmounts fear that only incites to transgressing boundaries. It is in human nature that one longs to transcend them at any cost and keep them simultaneously.⁴⁹

Ali, alias Tulip, who later in her life tells stories for a living, is compared with Rembrandt. They both make themselves the objects of their work: Ali “knots himself into stories” to such an extent that he does not know “where he begins and the stories end,”⁵⁰ whereas Rembrandt paints a great deal of self-portraits dressing up and putting on make-up, like in the theatre. They become the indissoluble part of their art: Rembrandt’s portraits are “surfacing through the painter and into paint,”⁵¹ while Ali, putting himself into a story is similar to a Turk who “knots a fine carpet and finds himself in the pattern.”⁵² They both make the psychic journeys out and shove their own boundaries “inching into other selves.”⁵³ Their art constitutes a record of their numerous incarnations, of “many lives — lives piled in on one another.”⁵⁴

The androgynous Ali, referred to as “he” or “she,” as well as Vilanelle, both making up stories, can be said to fulfill Virginia Woolf’s plea for artists

⁴⁴ WINTERSON, *The PowerBook*, p. 15.

⁴⁵ WINTERSON, *The PowerBook*, p. 12.

⁴⁶ WINTERSON, *The PowerBook*, p. 22.

⁴⁷ GEORGES BATAILLE, *Eroticism* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p. 219.

⁴⁸ BAUDELAIRE after BATAILLE, *Eroticism*, p. 127.

⁴⁹ BATAILLE, *Eroticism*, p. 141.

⁵⁰ WINTERSON, *The PowerBook*, pp. 215—216.

⁵¹ WINTERSON, *The PowerBook*, p. 214.

⁵² WINTERSON, *The PowerBook*, p. 215.

⁵³ WINTERSON, *The PowerBook*, p. 214.

⁵⁴ WINTERSON, *The PowerBook*, p. 214.

to have androgynous minds in which the feminine and the masculine elements exist in equilibrium. The division between female and male is for Woolf artificial and impoverishing. As a matter of fact, she supports the thesis that nobody has a stable sexual identity: "Different though the sexes are, they intermix. In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness."⁵⁵ Her conviction that everyone is in a way transgendered was probably influenced by Edward Carpenter's celebration of a "third" or "Intermediate Sex," able to attain a sort of androgynous transgression of the constraints of heterosexuality.⁵⁶ Also Hélène Cixous claims that the presence in the artist of "an abundance of the other, of the diverse" is necessary to create. Conceding the component of the other sex enriches the artist and makes them complex, strong, mobile and open beings who do not allow the sexual repression to make them "coded mannequins."⁵⁷ Showalter, on the other hand, interprets Woolf's concept of androgyny presented in *A Room of One's Own* as a kind of escapism "from the confrontation with femaleness or maleness."⁵⁸

The PowerBook proffers also another manner to get liberated from the burden of one's body: to take advantage of an e-writer's service who writes stories according to the client's wishes. The client enters the story following the writer's instructions: "Undress. Take off your clothes. Take off your body. Hang them up behind the door. Tonight we can go deeper than disguise."⁵⁹ Angela Carter's character in *The Tiger's Bride* also "takes off" her body, disclosing an animal: "'He will lick the skin off me!' And each stroke of his tongue ripped off skin after successive skin, all the skins of a life in the world, and left behind a nascent patina of shiny hairs."⁶⁰ "Taking off" the body, like in Winterson, means here setting free of the social construct of the character's person, and discovering alternative models of gender and sexuality. Similarly, in Monique Wittig's *The Lesbian Body* ripping "off m/y skin with the claws of your paws"⁶¹ articulates the reappropriation of the discourse of desire. The body becomes abject then — it is something the protagonist longs to get rid of, together with the set of rules it has to obey. Yet, enjoying "the freedom to

⁵⁵ WOOLF, *Orlando*, pp. 133—134.

⁵⁶ SANDRA M. GILBERT, "Introduction," in: VIRGINIA WOOLF, *Orlando* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), p. xvii.

⁵⁷ HÉLÈNE CIXOUS, "Sorties," in: eds. DAVID LODGE and NIGEL WOODS, *Modern Criticism and Theory* (London: Longman, 1988), p. 269.

⁵⁸ ELAINE SHOWALTER, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton, N.Y.: Princeton UP, 1977), p. 289.

⁵⁹ WINTERSON, *The PowerBook*, p. 4.

⁶⁰ ANGELA CARTER, *Burning Your Boats. Collected Short Stories* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995), p. 169.

⁶¹ MONIQUE WITTIG, *The Lesbian Body* (London: Peter Owen, 1975), p. 22.

be somebody else,”⁶² the e-writer’s client runs the risk of leaving the story with an altered self since the whole “game” can get out of control and continue on its own, which is precisely what happens in *The PowerBook*, despite the initial feeling of being able to subjugate it: “I can change the story. I am the story.”⁶³

In *Sexing the Cherry* crossing over gender manifests itself through grafting. Tampering with a plant and fusing it “into a harder member of its strain, and so the two take advantage of each other” results in creating “a third kind, without seed or parent”⁶⁴ which displays a few advantages over the plants conceived in the natural way. The practice is disapproved by the church that dismisses it, like homosexuality, as unnatural, and by the Dog-Woman who deems the cherry as a monster and supports the opinion that the nature should not be manipulated with: “such things had no gender and were a confusion to themselves. ‘Let the world mate of its own accord.’”⁶⁵ Her view is convergent with that expressed in “The Mower Against Gardens,” a poem by Andrew Marvell. Declaring that “the cherry grew, and we have sexed it and it is female,”⁶⁶ Jordan points to gender as the imposition and social construct, in Maria DiBattista’s words, “not a fact, but a space in the psychic life, a hole or lapsus in identity onto which are projected the imagoes, archetypes, or stereotypes comprehended in terms male and female,”⁶⁷ and to the culture’s attachment to fossilized restrictions and binaries, as the process of creating the third sex proves the initial binarism to be redundant, rather than the culture’s flexibility to examine better gender options.⁶⁸ A cherry, a symbol of virginity and hymen, becomes thus self-sufficient, similarly to aforementioned Adam and Madonna, and hints at a feasibility of plural scenarios of sexuality. Learning “the art of grafting,” Jordan would like to exert it to himself for he discovers polyphony within himself: pursuing the female mode of travelling and exhibiting female features, he fantasizes about a homosexual union with Tradescant: “to have some of Tradescant grafted on to me so that I could be a hero like him.”⁶⁹

Jordan escapes his gender through cross-dressing which is necessary for him to make enquiries among prostitutes about Fortunata, a dancer he has

⁶² WINTERSON, *The PowerBook*, p. 4.

⁶³ WINTERSON, *The PowerBook*, p. 5.

⁶⁴ WINTERSON, *Sexing ...*, p. 78.

⁶⁵ WINTERSON, *Sexing ...*, p. 79.

⁶⁶ WINTERSON, *Sexing ...*, p. 79.

⁶⁷ MARIA DIBATTISTA, *Virginia Woolf’s Major Novels: The Fables of Anon* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 118.

⁶⁸ LAURA DOAN, “Jeanette Winterson’s *Sexing the Postmodern*,” in: *The Lesbian Postmodern*, ed. LAURA DOAN (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 152.

⁶⁹ WINTERSON, *Sexing ...*, p. 79.

fallen in love with. Nevertheless, the female appearance is not tantamount to being a woman — other women can detect the trick, since Jordan makes use of what Dale Spender has termed “man-made language,”⁷⁰ straying from the female one that is “structured by signs and expressions, that uses ordinary words as code-words meaning something other.”⁷¹ Subsequently, Jordan feels as though he were a foreigner: “In my petticoats I was a traveller in a foreign country. I did not speak the language. I was regarded with suspicion.”⁷²

However, even if cross-dressing appears successful, it constitutes the cancellation of one sex in favour of the other. After inceptive catharsis, arising from the relief from enforced constraints, it probably leads to the necessity of accepting the burdens of the other sex, and turns into another kind of self-discipline, necessitated by “doing gender.”

Endorsing the multiplicity of selves, Winterson destabilizes the traditional understanding of sex, gender and sexuality. Through her disguised and androgynous characters she poses a question whether transgressing gender can impact on a deconstruction of the masculine/feminine binary and allow a third-gendered identity. Depicting gender as complex and shifting, Winterson also explores the contingencies how the body demonstrates and possesses identity.⁷³ Declaring gender and even the body to be costumes, she enunciates that gender and sexuality do not resolve themselves to each other, nor confirm a person’s identity,⁷⁴ which constitutes an antithesis of the Freudian claim “Anatomy is destiny.” This redirection of the rendering of identity cancels the boundaries and opens up “a space uncluttered by association. It might be a void or it might be a release. Certainly — as one of the characters declares — I want to take the risk.”⁷⁵

⁷⁰ After CATH STOWERS, “Journeying with Jeanette: Transgressive Travels in Winterson’s Fiction,” in: eds. MARY MAYNARD and PURRIS JUNE, (*Hetero*)*Sexual Politics* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1995), p. 155.

⁷¹ WINTERSON, *Sexing ...*, p. 31.

⁷² WINTERSON, *Sexing ...*, p. 31.

⁷³ LEIGH GILMORE, “Without Names. An Anatomy of Absence in Jeanette Winterson’s *Written on the Body*,” in: *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2001), p. 125.

⁷⁴ GILMORE, “Without Names ...,” p. 129.

⁷⁵ JEANETTE WINTERSON, *Written on the Body* (London: Vintage, 1995), p. 81.

Sonia Front

„Zdejmij ubranie. Zdejmij ciało“

Przekraczanie granic płci kulturowej w twórczości Jeanette Winterson

Streszczenie

Jeanette Winterson dekonstruuje płć kulturową swoich bohaterów i pozwala im przekraczać granice z zamiarem uwolnienia ich od ciężaru *genderu*. Odmawiając wyboru pomiędzy dychotomiami, Winterson łączy je, co przyjmuje kształt androgynie i biseksualizmu. Artykuł traktuje o jej bohaterach androgynicznych, którzy obejmują zarówno miasta, jak i ludzi, omawiając szczegółowo przedstawienie Wenecji w *Namiętności* oraz *Sztuce i kłamstwach*, współgrające z przedstawieniem głównych bohaterów. Podczas gdy Villanelle z *Namiętności* jest „naturalną” hermafrodytą, Handel w *Sztuce i kłamstwach* poddaje się operacji. Inne strategie wyrażenia fluktuujących inkarnacji seksualnych obejmują zjawisko *drag*, omówione na przykładzie kastrata w *Sztuce i kłamstwach* i Ali w *Wolności na jedną noc*, interaktywną książkę elektroniczną w *Wolności na jedną noc* oraz praktykę krzyżowania roślin w *Płci wiśni*. Wszystkie te strategie obnażają *gender* jako konstrukt społeczny, sugerują możliwość zaburzenia dychotomii i powstania innych opcji *genderowych*.

Sonia Front

„Zieh deine Kleidung aus. Zieh deinen Körper aus“

Die Überschreitung von den Grenzen des Kulturgeschlechtes in Jeanette Wintersons Werken

Zusammenfassung

Jeanette Winterson zieht das Kulturgeschlecht ihrer Helden aus und erlaubt ihnen, Grenzen zu überschreiten, um sie von der *gender-* Last zu befreien. Die Wahl zwischen den Dichotomien verweigernd, verbindet sie sie in Form von Androgynie und Bisexualismus. Der vorliegende Artikel handelt über ihre androgyne Helden, zu denen sowohl Städte wie auch Leute gehören. Die Verfasserin bespricht ausführlich die Darstellung des Venedigs in den Werken *Die Leidenschaft* und *Kunst und Lügen*, die mit der Darstellung der Haupthelden in Einklang steht. Während die Heldin der *Leidenschaft*, Villanelle, ein „natürlicher“ Hermaphrodit ist, unterzieht sich Handel in dem Werk *Kunst und Lügen* einer Operation. Andere Strategien zum Ausdrücken der fluktuierenden sexuellen Inkarnationen umfassen: das am Beispiel des Kastrates in *Kunst und Lügen* und Ala in *Freiheit über eine Nacht* besprochene *drag* — Phänomen, interaktives elektronisches Buch in der *Freiheit über eine Nacht* und das Pflanzenkreuzen in dem Werk *Kirschgeschlecht*. All die Strategien entblößen *gender* als eine soziale Struktur und suggerieren, dass die Dichotomie gestört werden kann und es ist möglich, dass noch andere *gender* — Alternativen entstehen.