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THE TREATMENT OF GENDER AND TIME IN WINTERSON'S AND SPARK'S NOVELS

In this essay I am going to deal with the representation of gender and time in Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), *The Passion* (1987) and Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961) and *The Driver's Seat* (1970). I think there are many similarities in methods used by these authors, especially in the treatment of time.

I agree with critics who argue that Winterson tries to challenge and overcome culturally constructed binary oppositions between two genders. Winterson tries to do so by rewriting "not only femininity, but also masculinity (Makinen, 61)". She imposes femininity on men and masculinity on women. This strategy is evident in both novels, but much more in her later one, *The Passion*. It is true that in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* Jeanette's father cleans shoes and her mother builds a bathroom, but it is still he who financially provides for the family and the mother takes care of their home. Besides his love for Villanelle (*The Passion*), there is little masculine about Henri: he is a cook, which is traditionally a female job, he is unable to kill even a rabbit, he is homesick, shy, sentimental etc. On the other hand, Villanelle is even less unambiguously a woman: not only does she have a gambling problem, she also initiates actions, she is daring and brave, which are all attributes, usually thought of as masculine. In addition, Villanelle has male bodily markers: she is unusually tall; she has small breasts and webbed feet,

which were up to her birth genetically inherited only by men. Jeanette correctly recognizes her “inability to realize the limitations of [her] sex (132)”, and both she and Villanelle transgress those limitations. Both are punished by being seen as odd and freakish, but there is one important difference – Villanelle has been accepted by her parents the way she is.

Winterson also uses a strategy called mimesis, which according to Irigaray, involves deliberate cover-up and rejection of traditional features of femininity and denying the natural role, culturally imposed to the female sex. Jeannette feels sick when her mother makes her wear a pink raincoat and feels trapped by its symbolism: “I remembered a film I had seen called *The Man in the Iron Mask*”. Villanelle cross-dresses and so rejects the traditional female clothing. Besides, according to Harris, drag seeks to undermine the binary gender system and the regime of compulsory heterosexuality.

Villanelle could also be seen as what Irigaray calls the other gender. Irigaray further claims that drag creates more genders by taking up and redeploying the signs of binary gender system, that is, the cultural markers of masculinity and femininity. Villanelle and Henri combine the markers of both genders and thus far more successfully than Jeanette in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* bridge the gap between two different worlds (worlds of masculinity and femininity), but reject neither of them. Villanelle is bisexual and Henri, although being heterosexual, accepts lesbianism as normal from the very start.

As a whole, Winterson’s novels are an effective escape from traditional portrayals of binary differences between sexes, although *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* has some slips. I agree with Makinen who claims that Winterson “falls foul of [her] own critique in its portrayal of the ‘enemy’ men (28)”.

By the notion of men as physically grotesque and by her disgust for them, Jeanette intensifies the binary oppositions set by her mother and moves herself away from both. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* constructs binary oppositions and “participates in the kind of othering it generally opposes (Makinen, 15)”. Thus Winterson leaves the binary oppositions between feminine / masculine and homosexual / heterosexual. Jeanette herself shouts at pastor: “It’s you not us (103)”

thus creating a barrier between them (Jeanette and Melanie) and all others: homosexuals and heterosexuals.

Winterson does not allow plurality of possibilities and does not show all types of love as natural. Men and heterosexuality are marginalized or even overlooked. For Winterson, men are “something you had around the place, not particularly interesting, but quite harmless (*Oranges are not the Only Fruit*, 126)”, which proves she overlooks them on purpose. She portrays feminized men (Henri, Jeannette’s father...), masculine women (Jeanette’s mother, Villanelle...), traditional feminized women, but there are no traditional masculine men. The closest to the latter are pastors in *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* and soldiers in *The Passion*, but even they are shown as narrow-minded, hypocritical, aggressive, vindictive and ugly.

Heterosexual love and encounters are portrayed as perverse, unnatural and unfulfilling (Villanelle and her husband, soldiers and prostitutes and above all, Jeanette’s mother’s hatred for sex and her celibacy), especially in her earlier novel. In *The Passion*, she partly distances herself from such portrayals. There are no happy marriages in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*; in *The Passion*, we might consider as happy Villanelle’s parents’ marriage – thus Winterson slightly offsets the critical portrayal of heterosexuality. Jeanette reveals her fear of heterosexuality when she dreams of a wedding, where a man turns to a pig. This fear is reinforced by the concept that most men are beasts and the repulsion she feels towards her uncle Bill.

On the other hand, Winterson represents lesbian sex as unremarkable, unsurprising. There are at least eight lesbians in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, but only few of them feel guilty about their sexual orientation (Jeanette’s first love ultimately rejects homosexuality). Although there were attempts to make them feel sinful, they were all unsuccessful. To Jeanette, her sexual encounters seem natural and she and Melanie reject the priest’s interpretation of it being unnatural passion, disease or possession of a demon. And while in *The Passion* Winterson “portrays lesbian desire as a ‘universalizing’ strategy that posited all love as being basically the same whatever the age, gender, race or orientation of the lovers (56)”, she does not do so in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*: in this novel lesbian love is a root of discord.

Winterson's women are active, independent and domineering, and Jeanette grows up in a matriarchal family. But, images of femininity are constructed by a male-dominant society and Makinen sees "Jeanette's mother only as a 'gatekeeper' of patriarchy (31)". And the more trapped Jeanette feels in such society, the more she resorts to stories, which serve as an escape from unbearable pressures of her society. Also, "telling stories differently, or re-imagining and re-mapping life, is to love differently (Childs, 261)". As it is necessary to gamble if you want to recognize the beauty of gambling, it is also necessary to accept the gamble of loving and risk your world being blown apart, if you want to experience the beauty of loving. Stories are the ones which give Jeanette the strength to follow her heart and to withstand her mother and the society. Women and the world in her stories mirror the world as Jeanette would want it to be. The heroines of the fairytales in *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* are wise, resourceful and brave and "make assertive choices instead of enduringly and self-scarifying staying at home, sweeping hearths and awaiting a charming prince (Makinen, 47)". They reject marriage, are educated and live on their own. They are the similar type of women as are portrayed by Muriel Spark in her novels *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and *The Driver's Seat*.

Lise, the protagonist of the latter novel, is described as hard-working, efficient, neat and independent. She is an unmarried woman, who wants to take control over her own life and death. Her pursuit of power is evident early on in the novel, when she is buying a dress. Such an outburst is untypical for Lise, but she is satisfied with herself and her own dominance over the situation. Her actions are described, but her thoughts and inner drives are never explained, because the third-person narrator does not know them: "Who knows her thoughts? Who can tell (42)?" A reader can only make a wild guess at why she behaves like she does. It is clear that everything she does is aimed towards her death and in denial of life, but she does not seem as depressed as suicidal people usually are (although one cannot be sure of it because her emotions are never shared with a reader). She has hysterical outbursts, when she suddenly starts crying seemingly without a reason: "I thought I knew him,' Lise says. She is crying, her tears fall heavily. She says, 'I was sure he was the right one. I've got to meet someone (41)". Anyhow, Lise is the

one who takes the driver's seat in the vehicle of her life. She plans her bizarre suicide and has an unbelievable control over Bill. He could walk away, but he does not, as if he is trapped: "I don't want to do it. ... Let me go (106)". He knows he will be imprisoned, but still he follows her instructions as he is told to, even when she is already dead. The only deviation from her orders is rejecting rape.

Lise is in many ways similar to Miss Brodie, who also lives alone, earns her living, is educated and extremely smart. She is best described by the narrator:

"There were legions of her kind during the nineteen-thirties, women from the age of thirty and upward. ... They were not, however, committee women. They were not school-teachers. The committee spinsters were less enterprising and not at all rebellious, they were sober church-goers and quiet workers. ... But those of Miss Brodie's kind were great talkers and feminists and, like most feminists, talked to men as man-to-man (42-3)".

Miss Brodie is certainly a unique character. She has progressive mind and methods, but is too self-centered and contradictory: she distrusts Roman Church, but goes to Rome in pursuit of culture; she is very proud of Scottish Church, but she detests John Knox; she is very fond of romantic love, but falls in love with a married man with six children, whose hobby is chasing women. Like Lise, Jean is obsessed with control, not only over her own life, but over others' as well. Like Lise, she is a very strong woman and actually manages to have power over others. Most of the girls, belonging to the famous Brodie set later admit that Miss Brodie was their greatest influence in life. She influences Mary so much that she goes to Spain to fight for Franco. Mussolini, Franco and Hitler, her role models, were dogmatists like she is (When she asks who the greatest Italian painter is and one of the pupils says it is Leonardo da Vinci, she responds: "That is incorrect. The answer is Giotto, he is my favourite (11)".), but they also had a vast power in their hands. "Like other Spark heroines she is inclined to solipsism, unable to understand the wider world except as an extension of herself (Bold, 68)". Like Lise, I find Jean extremely selfish. Lise knowingly ruins Bill's life, while Jean

chooses her surrogate to sleep with her lover and demands from girls to cancel all their activities, when she wants to talk to them – about her own problem, of course. Although Spark mocks Jean Brodie, “the fun which is enjoyed at Miss Brodie’s expense is kept in proportion-she is never gayed, and never becomes a figure of caricature (23)”.

I think that the main difference between Winterson’s and Spark’s women is that the former are heroines and the latter are victims. Winterson’s heroines fight with the outside world and win (I think that Jeanette’s refusal of her mother’s will and dogmatic demands of the society she leaves in, is a victory of individuality). Spark’s women are victims of themselves and to some extent designs of others, of their own solipsism, inability to accommodate, fanaticism and conceit.

Men in Spark’s novels have bigger importance than in Winterson’s, but are still ‘milksofs’. Not only they do what they are told by women, they are also afraid of them (Bill). They are less educated than women; they do not occupy important positions (e. g. Marcia Blaine’s School is run by a woman) and are professionally unsuccessful (like Mr. Lloyd, who is only a third-rate artist).

The treatment of time in Winterson’s and Spark’s novels is also very complex. They use time-shifts in combination with authorial third-person narration or multiple first-person narrators, stream of consciousness, tense leaps, subjective treatment of history etc.

“Time-shift is ... usually naturalized as the operation of memory, either in the representation of a character’s stream of consciousness ... or as the memoir of a character-narrator (Lodge, 77)”. Winterson believes that “it is a mistake to try and lock yourself into any one place or time, because it’s simply not how the mind works. The mind always travels, and it travels dimensionally (Reynolds, 20)”. All four novels “challenge conventional notions of time [and] querying history (Childs, 258)”.

Winterson deals with history in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and in *The Passion*. The latter fits Linda Hutcheon’s term ‘historiographic novel’, a novel, which uses history to explore the present. The novel is set in the nineteenth century, in the time of

Napoleonic wars. But Winterson makes it clear in the foreword that it is not a historical novel. But just like in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, time itself is not important. She explores universal themes, which are only disguised in different time and place. Also, with such references and giving a voice to a woman in the history, "Winterson indicates how ideas and beliefs about history and reality are social constructs, which can be changed and can be re-imagined (Childs, 258)".

Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and especially *The Passion* can also be seen as a critique of traditional notion of history. Winterson magnifies the individual's role in history-making and challenges the traditional notion of history being male-constructed. Usually women were overlooked in history, but Winterson positions a woman in history and gives her a role in history-making. In such a way, she gives a voice to a contemporary and historical woman.

In *The Passion* she combines history with fantasy, but in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, she claims that history is like story-telling. Each individual creates his/her own history / story. Each of us tells a story differently – we leave out, add, change what we please. Makinen claims that "Napoleon's history carries the same structuring authority as the Bible (77)". In *The Passion*, Winterson uses grotesque elements and thus, according to Makinen, creates a new type of postmodern historiographic fiction, one element of which is also a refusal to see the history (and time) as a straight line.

From the very first lines it is clear that both *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and *The Passion* are structured anti-linearly, like "a maze ... not symmetrical, ... but not chaos either (*Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, xiii)". The narration continually leaps backwards and occasionally forwards, and the strategy Winterson uses to achieve this is the use of multiple narrators. Both novels are told in the first-person narration, in the earlier one it is Jeanette. Actually, there are multiple (or at least double) "Jeanettes" – there is young, immature Jeanette (aged seven to around twenty, when she goes to University), who narrates the story; occasionally mature, grown-up Jeanette intervenes and gives her opinion, judges, expresses her thoughts, comments, explains etc. When Jeanette confronts the pastor after her relationship with Melanie has been discovered, it is mature Jeanette that answers him "To the pure all things

are pure (103)", not the teenage one. Sometimes mature Jeanette confirms young Jeanette's thoughts: "Well, that's that then,' I thought. And it was. (22)." The book opens with the adult narrator: "Like most people I lived for a long time with my mother and father (3)". It is mature Jeanette who speaks ironically of the parishioners: "I was down to preach, and as usual a great number found the lord. (112)". The mature narrator is also the one that leaps forward: "Years later, when I was needing a Saturday job, she helped me out. (57)".

Very interesting in the novels discussed in this essay is also the use of tenses. Both novelists use three different tenses (future – present – past) in the space of one paragraph. Since each time the novelists do that is when they are expressing their thoughts, I believe these leaps of tenses are actually stream of consciousness: "I try not to take any notice ... The general sandwich inspection continues ... Susan Green had cold fish ... (*Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, 33)". It is obvious that immediately after the narrator switches from telling about something she is emotionally involved with to describing her surroundings, the tense switches from present to past. Furthermore, even when she writes in past tense, she uses time adverbs like now, at this moment, which are typical of present tense.

In both Spark's novels, there are constant flashbacks (analepses) and flashforwards (prolepses). Sometimes it is difficult for a reader to deal with such a method, because one is uncertain when, or even where something has happened. Chapter Two is an example of this: Chapter One ends with Mary MacGregor making a fool out of herself again at Miss Brodie's lesson. Chapter Two begins with Mary's death some years later along with her pondering on her happiest years. The novel opens in 1936, goes back to 1930 and uses time shifts to indicate the rise of the Brodie set and the fall of Miss Brodie. Before the reader knows the reason for Jean's downfall, the date of her death is given. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and *The Driver's Seat* make full use of the combination of time-shifts and an authorial third-person omniscient narrator. The reader himself must make logic out of the events. Stubbs argues that "the jumps in time ... are superficially arbitrary, but a slight examination shows that they partake of a species of logic. They display for us the workings of the writer's mind (21)". In *The Driver's Seat* the narrator "speaks" in the

present tense, which emphasizes the narrator's detachment as each moment is carefully picked out without comment. Occasionally the tense leaps forward into the future. From the statements about what will happen the following day, it becomes clear Lise will be murdered. These flashes forward are also a means of creating suspense, but the reader does not ask oneself *what* will happen, but *why*? This question, however, remains unanswered.

With unbelievable talent for writing and using highly postmodern techniques both Muriel Spark and Jeanette Winterson create unforgettable strong-willed women, who react as best as they could in the time they live in. These women have their free will and choice to do as they like, but most importantly, they have a voice. And that is the greatest contribution of both authors.

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POVZETEK

Obravnava spolov in časa v romanih Jeanette Winterson in Muriel Spark

Obe avtorici, Jeanette Winterson in Muriel Spark kljubujeta tradicionalno zastavljenim binarnim nasprotjem med moškim in žensko in jih skušata prestopiti. Za moške v romanih Jeanette Winterson je značilna feminilnost, medtem ko imajo ženske moške značilnosti. Zanika tradicionalne delitve vlog po spolih. V njenih romanih so moški in heteroseksualnost marginalni. Obe avtorici slikata ženske, ki so aktivne, samostojne, dominantne, izobražene, zavračajo poroko, živijo same in imajo svoje življenje v svojih rokah. Za razliko od Wintersoninih ženskih likov, ki so junakinje, so ženske v romanih Muriel Spark žrtve sebe ali drugih.

Obe avtorici zanikata tradicionalno dojetje časa in zgodovine. Wintersonova s postavitvijo dogajanja v preteklost raziskuje sedanost. Povečuje vlogo posameznika pri ustvarjanju zgodovine. Opreka tradicionalnim dojetjem zgodovine kot konstrukta moških in pomembno vlogo pri ustvarjanju le-te dodeli ženskam. Romani obeh avtoric so zgrajeni nelinearno; dogajanje se konstantno premika v času naprej in nazaj.

ABSTRACT

The treatment of gender and time in Winterson's and Spark's novels

Both Jeanette Winterson and Muriel Spark try to challenge and overcome culturally constructed binary oppositions between two genders. Winterson imposes femininity on men and masculinity on women. She denies traditional gender roles. In her novels, men and heterosexuality are marginalized or even overlooked. Both Winterson and Spark portray women, who are active, independent and domineering; they reject marriage, are educated, live on their own and are in control of their lives. The main difference between Winterson's and Spark's women is that the former are heroines and the latter are victims (either of themselves or the others).

Both authors deny traditional notion of time and history. Winterson uses history to explore the present. She magnifies the individual's role in history-making and challenges the traditional notion of history being male-constructed. She gives a woman a role in history-making. Both Spark's and Winterson's novels are set anti-linearly with the use of prolepses and antilepses.