# The Space of the Body: Geopolitics and Bodily Topographies in Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion*

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**Abstract**

*The aim of this paper is to delve into the analogy between the female body and the city of Venice in Jeanette Winterson's "The Passion", since both conjure up metaphors of fluidity and ambiguity. It will be pointed out that Venice is the spatial representation of Villanelle on many levels: Venice may be read as a female body, as a metaphor of otherness, marginality and abjection and even as a black hole of identity. Villanelle's bodily ambiguity, her psychological alterity, her position as an Other in the dialectic master/slave, and finally, her interest in cross-dressing place her in a mirroring relationship with the city of Venice.*

**Key Words:** *gender, space, transgression, Imperialism, cross-dressing, the Other.*

## 1. Introduction

Throughout her work, Jeanette Winterson focuses mainly on gender borders, aiming in fact at their obliteration, which places her novels within what could be referred to as an "anxiety of limit". One of the first aspects that the idea of border evokes is spatiality: countries, cities, houses are bounded systems, and the body can also be interpreted as a *topos*. In *The Passion*, Winterson draws parallels between the human body and cities, countries and ultimately, the cosmos. It will be argued that such correspondences allow Winterson to fashion a sense of unity and to transcend gender binarism, but also to question power relations through the discourse of Imperialism.

The paper starts from Seaboyer's ideas in her article "Second Death in Venice: Romanticism and The Compulsion to Repeat in Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion*"(1997) and also applies Anne McClintock's ideas in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (1995) about male Imperialism and the feminization of space in the discussion of Henri and Villanelle's approach to space. Peter Ackroyd's study, *Venice: Pure City* (2009) will also provide key information regarding historical and cultural aspects of the Italian city which will be necessary in this analysis.

## 2. Venice as a female body in *The Passion*

*The Passion* is a novel in which space is used as an extension of complex philosophical and aesthetic dimensions, where cities and countries become metonyms for the human body and mind. The text shifts from Napoleon's army camps in France to the city of Venice, and then to the frozen fields of Russia. Out of these, Venice, which is the birthplace of Villanelle, is the most

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"enchanted" territory; it is also the locus of dissolution and transgression, of the simultaneous presencing of Eros and Thanatos, where topography can be held to signify the psyche. The analysis in this paper is grounded on a popular theory of urban studies which equates the female body to the *topos* of the city. Seaboyer's study has directed my attention to the interpretation of Venice as a corporeal instance of femininity; she argues that "Venice is a figure for two privileged and inextricably linked psychoanalytic tropes: death and the body of the woman" (Seaboyer 1997, 485). The other spaces in the novel, France and England, are represented as colonizing, male territories. The Napoleonic wars which form the backdrop of Henri and Villanelle's tales tap into the relationship between death drive and life drive, but also raise questions regarding the use of gender metaphors within the discourse of imperialism. The title of the novel, derived from the mantra which obsessively recurs throughout the novel, could be interpreted as a fundamental, Lacanian search for the Real: "Somewhere between fear and sex passion is"[1]. The main characters are searching for the absolute union, the impossible, unattainable wholeness, or in Lacanian terms, "the Real". Lacan claims that the Real is the initial state of wholeness that has been severed by the entrance into language, therefore it cannot be expressed in words "The Real is without fissure" (Lacan 1991, 97). Lacan identifies the Real as "that which prevents one from saying the *whole* truth about it" (Lacan qtd in Lee 1990, 136).

Geography is clearly gendered in Winterson's spatial configurations. Venice is described by Villanelle as an irrational city of shifting borders, a mazy configuration where space is constantly changing:

> This is the city of mazes. You may set off from the same place to the same place every day and never go by the same route. If you do so, it will be by mistake. 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 (*PA* 49).

The city as a fickle, dangerously misleading entity echoes the fluid construction of a woman's body. McDowell argues that women's boundaries with the world are not clearly set and female bodily physiology defies containment:

> Women's experiences of, for example, menstruation, childbirth and lactation, all represent challenged to bodily boundaries. The feminine construction of self is an existence centred within a complex relational nexus, compared to the masculine construction of self as separate, distinct and unconnected (McDowell 1993, 306).

As a city surrounded by water, Venice is unstable and uncertain: "This is the city of uncertainty, where routes and faces look alike and are not" (*PA* 58). A mixture of land and water, Venice is thus a metonym for Villanelle's own bodily ambiguity. Villanelle is born with webbed feet, a strange feature which is not supposed to occur in women: "There never was a girl whose feet were webbed in the entire history of the boatmen" (*PA* 51). She resists categorization, and could be construed as a reminder that a female body should not be muted. When her mother attempts to remove her webbed feet, the blade of the knife proves ineffective:

[1] Winterson, Jeanette (1987). *The Passion*. London: Penguin, p. 62. All further references to this work will be provided parenthetically as the abbreviation *PA*, followed by the page number.

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> The midwife took out her knife with the thick blade and proposed to cut off the offending parts straight away. My mother weakly nodded, imagining I would feel no pain or that pain for a moment would be better than embarrassment for a lifetime. The midwife tried to make an incision in the translucent triangle between my first two toes but her knife sprang from the skin leaving no mark. She tried again and again in between all the toes on each foot. She bent the point of the knife, but that was all (*PA* 51-52).

Regarded as signs of shame, as "offending parts", webbed feet indicate masculinity, which would imply that Villanelle is a liminal corporality, a female masculinity. Her mother wants to purge her of this sign of gender contagion, but Villanelle's body resists. As Halberstam argued in *Female Masculinity* (1998), "female masculinity is generally received by hetero and homo-normative cultures as a pathological of misidentification and maladjustment, as a longing to be and to have a power that is always just out of reach"(Halberstam 1998, 9). Villanelle opposes static definitions of womanhood and codifies paradox at both bodily and cultural level. She is simultaneously female, through her sex, and male, through her webbed feet; she uses cross-dressing as a form of acquiring a superior stand, the position of power, playing with gender in accordance with the preferences of the people she is dealing with. Her occupation as a card dealer at the Casino is the result of gender restrictions – she cannot be anything else, because there are few things a woman can do:

> There aren't many jobs for a girl. I didn't want to go into the bakery and grow old with red hands and forearms like thighs. I couldn't be a dancer, for obvious reasons, and what I would have most liked to have done, worked the boats, was closed to me on account of my sex (*PA* 53).

The threat of rape, the danger of being patronized or refused certain privileges determines Villanelle to walk between gender lines and avoid femininity when it denies her the power that she craves. However, she acknowledges that femininity can also be an advantage which she can turn to her favour; she uses sex as a tool to survive the cold winter and to acquire skills necessary for travelling the world: "Villanelle was skillful with the compass and map; she said it was one of the advantages of sleeping with Generals"(*PA* 101). Vilanelle's body is perpetually "under construction", an elusive, fluid and versatile system, as Luce Irigaray conceptualizes woman:

> Woman is neither open nor closed. She is indefinite, infinite, form is never complete in her. This incompleteness in her form allows her continually to become something else, though this is not to say that she is univocally nothing (Irigaray 1985, 229).

From another point of view, Salvaggio identifies three feminine spaces: "the marginal space, the space of the body and liquid space" (Salvaggio 1988, 271). By extension, Venice is also an entity in constant metamorphosis, resembling a living body whose shape changes and re-adjusts, always in different ways. When Henri first starts exploring the city, he gets lost. When he eventually finds Villanelle, he realizes that she was telling him the truth when she insisted that

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the city is always shifting: "I need a map. 'It won't help. This is a living city. Things change.' 'Villanelle, cities don't.' 'Henri, they do'" (*PA* 113).

The description of Venice as a body is not a recent, new-fangled theory. In his book on the history of the Italian city, *Venice: Pure City* (2009), Peter Ackroyd documents the evolution of Venice into a living organism, perceived by visitors and natives alike as a body with a heart: The Austrian writer Hugo von Hofmannsthal once described the archetypal city as "a landscape built of pure life." Can this pure life therefore be seen as a living force? Can Venice be shaped and governed by an instinctive existence, which is greater than the sum of its people? Is it more than just a collective? By the sixteenth century it was already being described as a human body where "the head is the place where the shores are situated; and that part towards the sea are the arms." The canals were the veins of this body. The heart lay in the city itself (Ackroyd 2009, 209).

It is interesting to note that the parts of the body associated with the intellect, such as the head, are associated with land. Whatever implies water is linked to the lower body or the entrails. Most cities exist on land: the peculiarity of Venice is its fluidity. The fact that "the heart" is located in the centre of the city suggests the fact that Venice is a city of feelings, one could even contend, a feminine city.

### 3. Othering the female body, othering Venice

Just like a female body, Venice is constructed as an "other"; in *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir proposes this category of the Other to analyze the way in which woman can be defined in relation to man: "Humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being […] she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other" (de Beauvoir 1956, 15-16). Elaine Showalter also describes female space as "the space of the Other, the gaps, silences and absences of discourse and representation, to which the feminine has been traditionally relegated" (Showalter, qtd in Salvaggio 1988, 262). Throughout the novel, Venice is represented as a fantastic city, an Imperial Other, fraught with superstition and mystic lore, a city which relies on difference for identification. As Villanelle warns Henri, "This is an unusual city, we do things differently here" (*PA* 116). Inner space is mirrored onto outer space; the novel makes a point out of creating psychic readings of topography, where the self can acquire a spatial double, as in the case of Villanelle. It will be argued that the female body of Villanelle is associated with interior space, with a journey inside the body whose final goal is self-discovery. Although the emphasis is on female corporality, a comparison with male constructions of space will be undertaken for the purpose of argument. Such a comparative approach will also highlight the aspects of femininity that are defined in relation to male representations of space and the body.

In his elaborate study of this city, Ackroyd dedicates a great deal of attention to carnival time. He draws attention to the uncertainty of boundaries and ultimately, to the inability to distinguish between reality and masquerade throughout the year, due to the frequency of the festivities. Originally intended to last for forty days, the duration of the carnival was extended in the eighteenth century to over six months. This positioned Venice as an irrational city, not worthy of "serious" matters: "if the festivities last for half a year, does "real" life then become carnival life? It was said in fact that Venice was animated by a carnivalesque spirit for the entire

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year. It was no longer a serious city such as London, or a wise city such as Prague" (Ackroyd 2009, 241).

In *The Passion*, Henri repeatedly describes Venice as a "city of madmen". He opposes the rational architecture of the French to the impossibly ludicrous Venetian cityscape, concluding that this is an untamed city, impossible to subjugate, a city whose logic thwarts understanding:

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

*The Passion* promotes relativity by opposing it to fixed systems of thought; hence, historical evidence is juxtaposed to myth and fairy-tale.

In the novel, Imperialism goes hand in hand with gender construction. If Venice represents a site of otherness, France comes to betoken an intersection of cultural metaphors associated with power: it stands for the oppressive force of Imperialism, which could be extended to encompass the rigid grid of heterosexuality imposed by male standards; on the other hand, Venice, through its outlandish mixture of water and land, narrow streets and canals and elusive sense of direction, is a metaphor of the colonized, hence, the ab-normative sexuality. Gender metaphors are inherent in imperial discourse. *The Passion* delves into imperialist relations of power by reinterpreting the historical figure of Napoleon and describing his conquests from the perspective of a "witness". Napoleon's myth as an all-powerful leader is demystified; Henri insists on the damaging effect of his wars and prefers to highlight the weaknesses of the great Frenchman: "He was the most powerful man in the world and he couldn't beat Josephine at billiards" (*PA* 13). Napoleon's obsession with chicken, his arrogance and appalling cruelty are featured as a form of counteracting imperialist and sexist rhetoric and giving a voice to otherness.

Winterson draws France as a masculine entity, which displays features of aggression, heroism, rationality and is intent on keeping borders very distinct. The act of conquering, as McClintock argued, is a form of feminizing space:

> As European men crossed the dangerous thresholds of their known worlds, they ritualistically feminized borders and boundaries. Female figures were planted like fetishes at the ambiguous points of contact, at the borders and orifices of the contest zone. Sailors bound wooden female figures to their ships' prows and baptized their ships as exemplary threshold objects – with female names. Cartographers filled the blank seas of their maps with mermaids and sirens. Explorers called unknown lands "virgin" territory. Philosophers veiled "Truth" as female, then fantasized about drawing back the veil. In myriad ways, women served as mediating and threshold figures by means of which men oriented themselves in space, as agents of power and agents of knowledge (McClintock 1995, 24).

McClintock also claims that feminizing space is a sign of male paranoia, of the desire to control boundaries: "If, at first glance, the feminizing of the land appears to be no more than a familiar symptom of male megalomania, it also betrays acute paranoia and a profound, if not pathological, sense of male anxiety and boundary loss" (McClintock 1995, 24). Sue Best

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expresses the same idea when she warns that the feminization of space is a double-edged mechanism: "feminizing space seems to suggest, on the one hand, the production of a safe, familiar, clearly defined entity, which, because it is female, should be appropriately docile or able to be dominated. But, on the other hand, this very same production also underscores an anxiety about this 'entity' and the precariousness of its boundedness (Best in Grosz and Probyn Eds. 2002, 183). With McClintock's theories of feminised space in mind, we argue that Venice is configured as an individualistic space that resists subjugation, and parallels Villanelle's rejection of male control. Just like Venice remains untouched by the master ambitions of French imperialism, Villanelle remains independent, refusing to marry Henri because they had a child together.

Villanelle uses space with both masculine and feminine connotations of the concept. She is a travelling subject, a foil to the traditional ideas of women as static, immanent, which would place her on the male end of the gendered trope. On the other hand, she embodies female valorifications of space, because she does not approach land with hegemonic claims. As Stevenson claims in her analysis of female travel writing, "women travellers developed strategies of accommodation, not confrontation or domination and [wrote] richly eclectic, loosely structured narratives of their discoveries about the continent, its peoples and their won psyches"(Stevenson, qtd in Mills 2005, 18). Unlike Henri, who is following Napoleon in his conquest of space, Villanelle's travelling involves a "journey of the interior", within the body, a journey concerned with exploring the inner territories rather than the appropriation of land. Such inner spaces are unmapped, because the idea of subjective space is incompatible with the rationality of a map:

> no map can properly represent a purely subjective space nor can it contain a subjective space within it […] No experiental space can properly be said to be an objective space, since any experiental space is a space with a clear ordering derived from the location, bodily configuration, perceptual capacities and capacities for movement of the experiencing creature (Malpas 2004, 59).

The primacy of subjective space is always emphasized in Villanelle's spatial configurations; she believes that the imagining space offers a tremendous freedom, and tells Henri that "the cities of the interior do not lie on any map"(*PA* 114). Travel, as Alison Blunt suggests, "involves the familiarization or domestication of the unfamiliar and at the same time the defamiliarization of the familiar or domestic" (Blunt 1994, 17). Villanelle seems to believe that there is always an interpenetration of the familiar and the unfamiliar implicit in the idea of travelling; she thinks that regular travelers, those who explore the outside spaces are prepared for change; the explorers of inner spaces face a much more challenging task, as they are venturing into a space fraught with surprises, constantly under metamorphosis, which causes a wave of shock:

> Travellers at least have a choice. Those who set sail know that things will not be the same as at home. Explorers are prepared. But for us, who travel along the blood vessels, who come to the cities of the interior by chance, there is no preparation. We who were fluent find life is a foreign language. Somewhere betweem swamp and the mountains. Somewhere between fear and sex. Somewhere between God and the Devil passion is and the way there is sudden and the way back is worse (*PA* 68).

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Her discourse corresponds to the observations made by many critics regarding the structure of female travel writing. In *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (2003), Mary Pratt observes that for female travel writers, identity "resides in their sense of independence, property and social authority, rather than in scientific erudition, survival or adventurism" (Pratt 2003, 159). Instead of relying on the "goal-oriented, linear emplotment of conquest narrative", women's narratives "are emplotted in a centripetral fashion from which the protagonist sallies forth and to which it returns" (Pratt 2003, 157-159). It could be noted that Villanelle's discourse is cut off from "serious" matters of Napoleonic politics; it centers on matters of the heart, and on the erratic, carnivalesque, excessive lifestyle typical of Venice. Villanelle inhabits a "space-off"[2], as Teresa de Lauretis puts it: a space which allows her to view the world from "elsewhere", and to simultaneously enter discourse and be marginalized in it:

> For that elsewhere is not some mythic distant past or some utopian future history: it is the elsewhere of discourse here and now, the blind spots, or the space-off, of its representations. I think of it as spaces in the margins of hegemonic discourses, social spaces carved in the interstices of institutions and in the chinks and cracks of the power-knowledge apparati. And it is there that the terms of a different construction of gender can be posed – terms that do have effect and take hold at the level of subjectivity and self-representation: in the micro-political practices of daily life and daily resistances that afford both agency and sources of power or empowering investments; and in the cultural production of women, feminists, which inscribe that movement in and out of ideology, that crossing back and forth of the boundaries – and of the limits of sexual difference(s) (de Lauretis 1987, 25).

Villanelle's influence extends to Henri, and she becomes the agent of the novel's undisciplined spatiality, driving him towards a more liberal understanding of space. Initially, Henri is in awe of Napoleon, feeling proud of being chosen as part of his personal suite. He borrows elements from his colonial discourse, appropriating as natural the ideas of border anxiety and enemy of the Empire. He is willing to bask in the negative myths about England, the arch-enemy country: Asked by a little girl if he will kill people, Henri replies: "Not people, Louise, just the enemy.' 'What is the enemy?' 'Someone who's not on your side'" (*PA* 8). Henri's statement refers to the abstracted coldness, cruelty and limitation of imperialism: people are no longer perceived as individuals, they are seen as a geopolitical whole that needs to be engulfed, reduced to sameness. Seaboyer goes further in her analysis of this particular fragment, claiming that this is a "crux": "Does violence inhabit only the body of the enemy Other whom the soldier sets out to confront in the name of Napoleon and France, or is his monster also himself, an inevitable effect of his construction as a human subject?" (Seaboyer 1997, 488).

Ultimately, we may argue that Henri illustrates the male, open, public space, while Villanelle portrays the female, private, closed space of the domestic. "The space outside the home becomes the arena in which social relations (i.e. status) are produced, while the space inside the home becomes that in which social relations are reproduced" (Spain 1992, 7). Hence,

[2] Space-off is a notion originating in film theory. Lauretis develops as a metaphor of the refusal to be contained within the representational nature of language. The original notion is defined as: "the space not visible in the frame but inferable from what the frame makes visible (de Lauretis 1987, 26).

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Henri's allegiance to the dominant male travelling model, set by Napoleon, is "corrupted" by a woman: "Immediately a rebellious voyaging to new realms is made explicit, the focus on Henri's disobedient and contravening travels away from the masculine paradigm of Napoleon towards the fantastic – and decidedly female –Venice" (Stowers in Maynard and Purvis Eds. 1995, 143). Initially, the city appears, unreal, fluctuating, almost fictional, outside the Frenchman's stable concepts of space:

> Arriving at Venice by sea, as one must, is like seeing an invented city rise up and quiver in the air. It is a trick of the early light to make the buildings shimmer so that they seem never still. It is not built on any lines I can fathom but rather seems to have pushed itself out, impudently, here and there. To have swelled like yeast in a shape of its own (*PA* 109-110).

After he gets lost, he retrieves Villanelle's heart and kills her husband, the cook, he is imprisoned on San Servelo for murder. Villanelle attempts to convince him to escape from prison. His refusal to do so indicates that he no longer regards exterior space as capable of offering him liberation and has now internalized a female concept of space, Villanelle's cities of the interior: "I don't ever want to be alone again and I don't want to see any more of the world" (*PA* 152). His account of space has now been feminized.

### 3. Venice and cross-dressing

Venice is the iconic urban representation of carnival. It is linked to disguise, masquerade, dramatization, cross-dressing, and identity metamorphosis. Much like the city seems to be always different, always shifting, Villanelle shifts between masculine and feminine gender roles by dressing as a boy. Disguise provides Villanelle with a second layer of uncertainty; while her body possesses both male and female sexual traits, the disguise she puts on reinforces this combination, so that corporality is mystified, turned into a confounding synthesis of gender. As Ackroyd suggests, even the origin of the word "carnival" indicates ambiguity: carne vale might mean both "a farewell to flesh" and "flesh mattered" (Ackroyd 2009, 243-244). Ackroyd also comments on the meaning of the mask as the epitome of doubling and mirroring. Masquerading in Venice

> suggests that the city itself might, like the maskers, lead a double life […] it is a city of doubleness, of reflections within reflections, in every sense. The mask is a sign of ambiguity. It has been said that nothing in Venice has a single meaning; everything, from art to government, is open to endless interpretation (Ackroyd 2009, 243-244).

Villanelle is keen on emphasizing this emblematic feature of her city; Venice is a place where nothing is what it appears to be:

> The city I come from is a changeable city. It is not always the same size. Streets appear and disappear overnight, new waterways force themselves over dry land. There are days when you cannot walk from one end to the other, so far is the journey,

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> and there are days when a stroll will take you round your kingdom like a tin-pot Prince (*PA* 97).

This uncertainty also means that there is a greater degree of freedom: Villanelle indulges in cross-dressing as a form of entertainment. In the end, the most liberating aspect of masquerade is that it brings about a release from cultural restraints and it warrants licentious behaviors. Terry Castle claims that masquerade triggered "an anti-nature, a world upside-down, an intoxicating reversal of ordinary sexual, social and metaphysical hierarchies" (Castle 1986, ix). At a deeper level, masquerade served as an "exemplary disorder", and a "meditation on cultural classification" (Castle 1986, ix). The interplay between antagonistic principles implied that masquerade fractured and capsized the gist of the world itself:

> The way the masquerade rendered a dialectical fluidity between opposites, magic unities instead of differences, was a symbolic revocation of cosmos itself. At its worst, the masquerade resembled a convulsive, unstoppable ripple through the core of things, a metaphysical shock-wave (Castle 1986, 84).

However, masquerade is not approached in this radical (and somewhat negative) way in *The Passion*: the fluidity of gender roles in Venice is regarded as the natural, not the abnormal order of things. At the Casino, Villanelle wears men's clothing because she must comply with the general requirements of her clients: "I dressed as a boy because that's what the visitors liked to see. It was part of the game, trying to decide which sex was hidden behind tight breeches and extravagant face-paste…"(*PA* 54). This gender uncertainty created through cross-dressing leads to the emergence of what Marjorie Garber called the "third sex" which is actually neither a term nor a sex, as it moves beyond the idea of androgyny or hermaphroditism: " 'The third' is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility. Three puts in question the idea of one: of identity, self-sufficiency, self-knowledge" (Garber 2002, 11). For Villanelle, cross-dressing is the "vested" expression of Venetian gambling: establishing the gender behind a mask is similar to gambling at cards or roulette, because both imply a degree of titillating anticipation. Villanelle describes the thorough process of hiding her gender as a means of amusement and protection:

> I made up my lips with vermillion and overlaid my face with white powder. I had no need to add a beauty spot, having one of my own in the right place. I wore my yellow Casino breeches with the stripe down each side of the leg and a pirate's shirt that concealed my breasts. This was required, but the moustache I added for my own amusement. And perhaps for my own protection (*PA* 55).

Villanelle seems to prefer the masculine position, indirectly acknowledging that women were exposed to more dangers than men and were deprived of certain rights. She cross-dresses in order to unsettle the balance of power; it is important to observe that female cross-dressers aimed for a higher status position whereas male cross-dressers lowered their status by dressing as women. As Bullough and Bullough suggest, a stereotype was formed in the Middle Ages regarding the differential status of male and female cross-dresser, and this cliché still survives:

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> female cross-dressers have not only been tolerated but even encouraged, if only indirectly, through much of Western history, since it was assumed they wanted to become like men and therefore, were striving to 'better' themselves. Males who cross-dressed other than in comic burlesque, on the other hand, not only lost status but also aroused suspicions because others believed they were either trying to gain access to women for sexual purposes or were following pre-Christian or anti-Christian rituals (Bullough and Bullough 1993, 46).

Bullough and Bullough also state that for a long time, cross-dressing was a relatively harmless activity, which did not come to be associated with lesbianism and homosexuality until the eighteenth century (Bullough and Bullough 1993, x). In *The Passion*, cross-dressing is laden with sexual signification. When Villanelle falls in love with the Venetian woman, she is dressed as a boy and she believes that she must preserve her masculine appearance in order to keep the woman's attention: "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" (*PA* 65). Later, it is revealed that the woman knew about her female gender and did not mind, which indicated that the relationship was lesbian from the beginning. On the other hand, Villanelle's relationship with her husband shows a different facet of homo/heterosexuality: "My flabby friend, who has decided I'm a woman, has asked me to marry him. He has promised to keep me in luxury and all kinds of fancy goods, provided I go on dressing as a young man in the comfort of our home"(*PA* 63). In this case, cross-dressing becomes a fetishistic act for the husband – seeing her as a man arouses sexual pleasure and places him at the intersection between heterosexuality and homosexuality.

Villanelle is also bisexual; however, because she is sexed female, cross-dressing has different meanings for her than for a man. Robert Stoller argues that female cross-dressers "have no clothing fetish" because "men's clothes have no erotic value whatsoever" (Stoller 1984, 195). Stoller claims that women cannot be transvestites, and draws attention to the importance of avoiding confusion between transvestism and transsexuality; thus, women who cross-dress are "transsexuals, quite comparable to male transsexuals. They wish to be males that is to have a body in every way male, and to live in all ways as a man does. They cannot stomach sexual relations with men; they are aroused only by women" (Stoller 1984, 195). Unlike men, these women are not "perverted": "Female cross-dressers cannot be admitted into the house of perversion, for they throw radically into question the centrality of the phallus as the fetishized object around which transvestism is supposed to be organized" (McClintock 1995, 173-174). It is obvious that Villanelle escapes such definitions; even if she cross-dresses, she is not repelled by men, though she considers them violent. Clothes do have an erotic value for her, because she experiences some form of sexual pleasure herself while cross-dressing, something she had in common with her husband: "He liked me to dress as a boy. I like to dress as a boy now and then. We had that in common" (*PA* 96). She questions the significance of gender-marked clothing, unable to distinguish between her own masks, thereby challenging the categorizing power of clothes and the provisional sense of identity they offer: "And what was myself? Was this breeches and boots self any less real than my garters?"(*PA* 66). It transpires from her question that the body is as easily permeable as the self; as Jorgensen suggests,

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> the fact that it does not take any more than a change of clothes to change the image of the body, illustrates that it does not take any more than a change of clothes to change the expression of the self, substantiating both body and self as equally fluid and interchangeable entities (Jorgensen 2005, 112).

Herein lies the "Venetian connection": the city of disguises is reproduced on Villanelle's body in the sense that the order reversal prompted by carnival and masquerade is projected on Villanelle's gender identity. Just as carnival-goers shift identities by switching masks and clothes, so does Villanelle experience with various roles and sexualities, proving that clothes are as provisional as gender categories. They can be put on and taken off at any time, opening up a universe of possibilities which transcends static binary systems.

## 4. Conclusions

This paper has argued that Winterson depicts Venice as a trope of female corporality: it is a city of unstable borders, a mazy and ambiguous configuration of water and land which evokes the changeable body of a woman. Venice is a fickle, dangerously misleading space which functions as the spatial metaphor of Villanelle: she is born a woman, but has webbed feet, which is a typical male characteristic. Just as Venice resists mapping, Villanelle is a liminal corporality, a female masculinity which opposes any form of alteration.

In another train of thoughts, Henri and Villanelle approach space differently, depending on their gender. Henri describes Venice as a "city of madmen", a space governed by magic and superstition, which cannot be rationalized by France, an Imperial "other". France displays the attributes of masculinity: power, rationality, hegemony, while Venice is pictured with the assets of femininity: marginality, irrationality, passion.

Mc Clintock's theory sheds light on the Imperial undertones of the book. Venice has been configured as an individualistic space which mirrors Villanelle's rejection of male control. Unlike Henri, who travels in the traditional sense of the word, Villanelle's travelling involves a "journey of the interior", a psychological mapping of her own persona. The interface Venice/Villanelle is also comprised in the meanings of cross-dressing: Venice is the city of disguises, and Villanelle's masquerade suggests that the borders of gender identity can be crossed as easily as putting on or taking off clothes. We have also referred to the Lacanian concept of desire with reference to the obsessive idea of "the passion": the passion represents the lost object of love and the impossible wholeness of being which the characters crave for.

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