THE GALAXY WITHIN: SPACE, QUANTUM PHYSICS AND THE FANTASY OF BODILY UNITY IN JEANETTE WINTERSON'S *GUT SYMMETRIES*

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Abstract: *Throughout this paper, I have directed my attention to Winterson's "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 Gut Symmetries, Winterson draws parallels between the human body and ultimately, the cosmos. I will argue 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. Gut Symmetries moves spatial representation further, to an encompassing vision of the body: the references to quantum physics and superstring theory, blended with Tarot card readings and Kaballah pave the way for a vision of the ultimate border transgression: the hermaphrodite.*

Keywords: *quantum physics, superstring theory, Kaballah, Tarot, the body, border, Grand Unified Theory*

In *Gut Symmetries*, Winterson makes the body into a small replica of a larger spatial system and the story of the love triangle mirrors the scientific idea that the three forces of the Universe can be united. The three main characters, Jove, Alice and Stella are initially well bounded: Jove is a physicist who studies the Grand Unified Theory, Stella is his wife, born with a diamond stuck in her spine, and Alice begins as Jove's mistress, only to become romantically involved with Stella as well. Thus, the novel evolves from a relationship where the boundaries are strictly set to one in which the three people involved can no longer distinguish between their corporeal and spiritual selves. Narratologically, this love triangle is mirrored in the structure of the chapters as each character takes turns in the diegesis and is attributed a certain Tarot card consistent with the plot.

Winterson interprets the body as a low-scale replica of the Universe, insisting on the fact that our bodies are made of stars; she lodges the story of a love triangle against a mixture of references to superstring theory, quantum theory, alchemy, Kaballah, astrology, even numerology. The title itself is an acronym for Grand Unified Theory (GUT), a theory which provides a scientific backdrop for Winterson's fantasies of completion. However, consistent with its title, the novel finds "symmetries" within opposing principles: therefore, science notions are juxtaposed to mystical observations. In her review of *Gut Symmetries*, Bilger comments on her surprise at the oxymoronic suddenness of the title, which joins together two antagonistic ideas: "The word gut, its physicality, its vulgarity, the fact that as a verb it means "to disembowel" has a disturbing effect when coupled with a word that indicates balance and order" (Bilger).

Winterson begins her novel with the ancient philosophy of Paracelsus: *The Prologue* is the key to the text, because it outlines her own belief in the analogies between the cosmos and the body: "The mediaevals were entrail-minded and Paracelsus often delivered his lectures over a scapelled corpse […] Paracelsus was a student of Correspondences: 'As above, so below'. The zodiac in the sky is imprinted in the body. 'The galaxa goes through the belly' " [1](GS 2). The body contains time and space, it is a universe in miniature: "What is it that you contain? The Dead. Time. Light particles of millennia. The expanding universe, opening in your gut. Are you

[1] Jeanette Winterson, *Gut Symmetries*. London: Granta, 1997, p. 2. All further references to this edition will appear as GS, followed by the page number.

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twenty-three feet of intestines loaded with stars?"(GS 2). The belief in an initial complete form of the universe, mirrored at human level through the hermaphrodite, is the platonic principle which informs the text's rejection of binarism. Winterson believes that representing the world in dualities is a repetition of the primordial drama of fragmentation: "It may be that here in our provisional world of dualities and oppositional pairs: Black/white, good/evil, male/female, conscious/unconscious, Heaven/Hell, predatory/prey, we compulsively act out the drama of our beginning, when what was whole, halved and seeks again its wholeness" (GS 4-5). It is clear that she reinterprets Plato's ideas from the Symposium; in the myth of the hermaphrodite, the original human can only be restored through love, through the union with "the other": "Each of us when separated, having one side only, like a flat fish, is but the tally-half of a man, and he is always looking for his other half"(Plato 162).

Further on, she explains how these ancient beliefs still have a strong relevance, because "the one" is still an object of modern physics research: "This is the theory. In the beginning was a perfect ten-dimensional universe that cleaved into two. While ours, of three spatial dimensions and the oddity of time, expanded to fit our grossness, hers, of six dimensions, wrapped itself away in tiny solitude" (GS 4). Winterson is describing here string theory, in which the number of dimensions is essential. Superstring theory requires a ten-dimensional spacetime: the observable three dimensions, to which a fourth dimension, duration, is added, therefore six more dimensions remain. The existence of extra dimensions could be explained through compatification: "If we start with a ten-dimensional superstring theory and compatify the six extra dimensions, the resulting four-dimensional theory is, in many cases, supersymmetric" (Zwiebach 9). Each scientific theory that Winterson enunciates is echoed on a personal level. This is why symmetries and numbers are explained both from a scientific and a non-scientific point of view. Her observations denote a strong grasp of theoretical physics as well as a belief in mysticism and ancient philosophy. The seemingly stable proliferation of coincidences, correspondences, parallelisms explodes with the introduction of a third term. The number three, the number which Grand Unified Theory seeks to resolve, is also the number dominating Jove's love life. Jove is a physics researcher whose goals are to promote the principles of Grand Unified Theory, a theory which gestures towards the erasure of separateness between the three fundamental forces. This is how the theory is described from a scientific point of view:

> The basic idea of grand unification is that the U(1), $SU(2)^2$ and $SU(3)^3$ interactions of the standard model of particle physics are actually components of a single unified force[…] Grand unified theory contain a fundamental symmetry that relate the behavior of the quarks that make up the proton. This symmetry guarantees that the charges are equal. Furthermore, if this symmetry were violated by even the smallest amount, then the theory would no longer be mathematically well defined (in Hetherington Ed. 309).

In the novel, Jove opposes the Standard Model. The separation between the three forces is no longer a valid scientific principle, yet it still has a certain lure through the idea of symmetry: "The attraction of the Model is that it recognizes the symmetries of the three fundamental forces, weak force, strong force, electromagnetic force. Difficulties begin when the three separate forces are welded together. His wife, his mistress met" (GS 97). The love triangle of Jove, Alice and

[2] The U(1) and SU(2) interactions are the fundamental ingredients of the Glashow-Weinberg-Salam theory and they combine to describe the weak and electromagnetic interactions.
[3] The SU(3) refers to the strong interactions described by quantum chromodynamics

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Stella represents the human metonym for the Grand Unified Theory: initially they are paired – Jove and Stella, Jove and Alice. But when the two women meet, they fall in love with each other and three becomes one: "One plus one is not necessarily two. I do the sum and the answer is an incipient third. Three pairs of two: Jove and Stella, Jove and Alice, Alice and Stella, and under the surface of each the head of the other" (GS 119-120).

As Winterson suggests, GUT provides the necessary grid for more than just the stark scientific interpretation of the Universe: it is a philosophy of life. It shows that everything is connected, that boundaries are just illusions and the universe itself is a form of poetry based on symmetry:

> This is more than a scientist's credo. The separateness of our lives is a sham. Physics, mathematics, music, painting, my politics, my love for you, my work, the star-dust of my body, the spirit that impels it, clocks diurnal, time perpetual, the roll, rough, tender, swamping, liberating, breathing, moving, thinking nature, human nature and the cosmos are patterned together. Symmetry. Beauty. Perhaps it seems that physicists seek beauty but in fact they have no choice. As yet there has been no exception to the rule that the demonstrable solution to any problem will turn out to be an aesthetic solution (GS 98).

The concept of boundary is proven to be hollow at so many different levels, as the text moves towards the ideal of wholeness. One of the first demonstrations of Winterson's belief in a unifying principle consists in the interweaving of physics with mysticism. The texts and ideas of Einstein, Oppenheimer, Heisenberg fuse with Kaballah, myths, and intertextual references to well-known literary works such as *Moby Dick.* This conglomerate points to the artificial distinction between "real" science and pseudo-science. Both types of knowledge systems have the same goal, reaching unity, only they do it in different ways: "The Miracle of the One that the alchemists sought is not so very far from the infant theory of hyperspace, where all the seeming dislocations and separations of the atomic and subatomic worlds are unified into a co-operating whole" (GS 2). As Alice emphasizes, knowledge does not spring from cold facts and categorization, but from "the patterns, rhythms, multiplicities, paradoxes, shifts, currents, cross-currents, irregularities, irrationalities, geniuses, joints, pivots"(GS 83). The quotes from Planck, Einstein and Oppenheimer which precede Alice's musings thoroughly support her point as all of them reinforce the instability of matter:

> "Science cannot solve the ultimate mystery of nature because we ourselves are part of nature and therefore part of the mystery we are trying to solve." (Max Planck)
>
> "It appears unavoidable that physical reality must be described in terms of continuous functions in space. The material point can hardly be conceived anymore." (Albert Einstein)
>
> "If we ask ourselves whether the position of the electron remains the same we must say no. If we ask whether the electron's position changes with time, we must say no. If we ask whether it is in motion we must say no" (Robert Oppenheimer) (GS 82).

By choosing these particular scientific standpoints, Winterson is debunking the certainties that physics is assumed to provide. The boundary between fact and fiction loosens and fragments the

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very core of knowledge as being contained in separate systems of thought; to Alice, energy is knowledge and knowledge itself is livingness: "The facts cut me off. The clean boxes of history, geography, science, art. What is the separateness of things when the current that flows each to each is live? It is the livingness I want. Not mummification. Livingness […] Energy precedes matter"(GS 83). The last part of the quote echoes the famous Sartrian axiom "existence precedes essence". Winterson's reworking of the existentialist idea that humans create themselves suggests a similar direction, a hierarchy where energy (or the soul) is the primordial force in the Universe. As Delio explains in *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being: God, Evolution and the Power of Love,* energy constitutes the real world:

> According to science, the mass of a body is the measure of its energy content. Mass and energy are not identical, but equivalent. Einstein's famous equation $E=mc^2$ showed that the energy (E) of a physical system is numerically equal to the product of its mass (m) and the speed of light (c) squared; matter can be converted into energy and energy into matter. Whenever matter interacts and binds with other matter, matter "disappears"(which is also the case with matter/antimatter interaction); whenever matter "falls apart" (as in alpha and beta decay), matter is "created". The "invisible" world of energy has a direct and solid connection to the "concrete" world of matter. For all practical purposes, energy is "the real world" (Delio 24-25).

The characters in *Gut Symmetries* interpret their lives using quantum theory. Alice's outlook proves to be as paradoxical as the Schrodinger cat experiment, because she strives towards opposing forces: "As a scientist I try to work towards certainties. As a human being I seem to be moving away from them. If I needed any proof of the provisional nature of what is called the world I was beginning to find it. Of what could I be sure? Absolutely sure?" (GS 27).

Another form of boundary loss is manifest in the way the characters approach love and death. With the death of her father, Alice considers the principles of quantum theory in order to avoid the trauma of loss. Thus, she regards death not as a terminus point, but as a wave function, a shifting of identity into another dimension:

> Where is my father? The decay of him is buried. Impossible that he should be alive and dead at the same time. Quantum theory states that for every object there is a wave function that measures the probability of finding that object at a certain point in space and time. Until the measurement is made, the object (particle) exists as the sum of all possible states […]Theoretically, it was always possible, though unlikely, to find my father beyond the solar system, his clustered energies elsewhere. More obviously, my father seemed to be here, as you and I are here, but we too can be measured as wave functions, unlimited by the boundaries of our bodies. What physicists identify as our wave function may be what has traditionally been called the soul. My father, at the moment of physical death, may simply have shifted to an alternative point of his wave function (GS 161).

The border between self and other is the ultimate threshold. Jove, Alice and Stella struggle with their love affair as their identities collapse and their sense of self becomes increasingly unstable. When Stella imagines her husband with Alice, she conjures up an amalgamation of bodies united in desire, indistinguishable: "His body. Her body. My body. Unseparated, twisting, dark/ The

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grinding collusion of skulls boned in lust. The silent gravity gone somersault of she on he on she […] He was me I was him are we her?" (GS 36-37).

Stella also believes that this lack of defined limits is an attack to the integrity of the self, similar to an inflicted wound: "To vow yourself to someone else is to open a wound. From it blood flows freely, life of you to them. We call it blood brothers. We call it dying Christ. The Fisher King's wound becomes him and will not heal. The vow of me to you and you to me is a red vulnerability on a grey shuttered world"(GS 37). She compares love to a sacrificial ritual, a sort of selfless act of surrender, which, once disrupted, becomes a mark of suffering. Like Christ or the Fisher King, the spurned lover must be prepared to renounce himself/herself for the sake of the loved one. This "red vulnerability" could be regarded as a traumatic event of boundary rupture: once the wound is open, it may never be closed, and it will always recur: "We transfused each other. Now you want me to bleed to death so that no one can tell what wound it was we shared. It is not so simple. Vows can be broken, usually they are, but the wound tunnels deeper into the body one day to recur" (GS 37). Love is therefore a transitional and dangerous state; as Mary Douglas claimed in *Purity and Danger*, "danger lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable. The person who must pass from one to another is himself in danger and emanates danger to others" (Douglas 119). It appears that Alice shares Stella's idea that love is a form of destruction: "The curios fact of love is that it overrides the body's rubber-sealed selfishness. Sex and procreation easily fit in with the body's plans for Empire; it wants to extend its territory, needs to reproduce itself. It resists invasion. Love the invader compromises the self's authority" (GS 26).

Just like in *The Passion*, the body is subject to Imperialistic claims, being likened to a territory whose borders are sieged by a conqueror, in this case metaphorically identified with love. At one point, Alice compares herself to one of the canals of Venice, suggesting that Jove could find himself only by directing the two women: "I did not mind being one of Jove's canals but I did not like being reeled off within the entire waterway. He shouted names as though he were giving directions. Perhaps that is what we were, elaborate ways for him to find himself" (GS 132). In this particular dramatization of Venice, Jove represents the city as a female body, and the gondoliers as the male conquerors, whose navigation skills suggest their sexual prowess: "Visitors to Venice will recall the genial machismo shouted across the canals, the tenor/baritone of 'Who did you have last night? […] At the end of the season, the gondolier who has nosed his prow furthest wins a dinner from his comrades" (GS 132). Conversely, after Alice's first escapade with Jove, as she wanders the streets of New York and feels the pangs of guilt, her reflection on New York turns into a mirror of her own life experience, in which pain and suffering are welded together; the American "crucible" city is comparable to an "alchemical vessel where dirt and glory do effect transformation. No one who succumbs to this city remains as they were. Its indifference is its possibility. Here you can be anything" (GS 25). This is a common trope of New York, also exemplified in Michel de Certeau's essay "Walking in the City":

> (New York) is transformed into a texturology in which extremes coincide-extremes of ambition and degradation, brutal oppositions of races and styles, contrasts between yesterday's buildings, already transformed into trash cans, and today's urban irruptions that block out its space. Unlike Rome, New York has never learned the art of growing old by playing on all its pasts. Its present invents itself, from hour to hour, in the act of throwing away its previous accomplishments and challenging the future. A city composed of paroxysmal places in monumental reliefs. The spectator can read in it a

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> universe that is constantly exploding. In it are inscribed the architectural figures of the *coincidatio oppositorum* formerly drawn in miniatures and mystical textures (de Certeau 91).

Therefore, just like Venice and New York are used to parallel the women's fluidity, Jove is set against Jove's more materialistic worldview. McClintock argues that imperialist discourse (male by excellence) is represented as a contradictory conflation of megalomania and fear of engulfment and dismemberment. There is a "recurrent doubling in male imperial discourse", which appears as a "simultaneous dread of catastrophic boundary *loss* (implosion), associated with fears of impotence and infantilization and attended by an *excess* of boundary order and fantasies of unlimited power" (McClintock 26). This theory might shed light on the differences between the way Jove and the two women approached love; it could also explain why Jove attacked Stella's body in the drifting boat. First, it is important to bear in mind that despite his profession and experiments with Grand Unified Theory, Jove remains a skeptic. He keeps his grip on the facts, expressing his belief in the immutability of matter: "Matter is energy. But for all practical purposes matter is matter. Don't take my word for it. Bang your head against a brick wall. The shifting multiple realities of quantum physics are real enough but not at a level where they affect our lives" (GS 191). He dismisses quantum theory because of its uncertainty and he associates it with a lack of borders which must be the appanage of femininity and madness: "My wife believed that she had a kind of interior universe as valid and as necessary as her day-to-day existence in reality […] She refused to make a clear distinction between inner and outer. She had no sure grasp either of herself or of herself in relation to the object" (GS 191). When Stella tells Jove that they may have entered a parallel universe while drifting at sea, Jove rejects her assumption as a figment of imagination, despite the fact that quantum physics admits the scenario as possible: "Stupid, stupid, stupid. The probability is beyond calculation. A large quantum transition such as that is virtually impossible"(GS 180).

Alice and Stella illustrate a female vision where borders are not crucial to the organization and functionality of their bodies, at a small scale and of the universe, at a larger scale. Alice disagrees with Jove's opinions, because they are too unflexible: "What to him were manipulable facts were for me imaginative fictions. Experimentally, it is beyond doubt that electrons exhibit contrary and simultaneous behavior. What does that suggest about us? About our reality? What is unwritten draws me on, the difficulty, the dream"(GS 206). As Cixous claims in "The Laugh of the Medusa", women, unlike men, do not fraction their bodies, and privilege wholeness:

> If there is a "propriety of woman" it is paradoxically her capacity to depropriate unselfishly: body without end, without appendage, without principal 'parts'. If she is a whole, it's a whole composed of parts that are wholes, not simple partial objects, but a moving, limitless changing ensemble, a cosmos tirelessly traversed by Eros, an immense astral space not organized any one sun that's any more of a sun than others […] Though masculine sexuality gravitates around the penis engendering that centralized body (in political anatomy) under the dictatorship of its parts, woman does not bring about the same regionalization which serves the couple head/genitals and which is inscribed only within boundaries. Her libido is cosmic, just as her unconscious is worldwide (Cixous in Leitch ed. 2052).

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Jove is indeed an epitome of maleness, being depicted as a self-centred man who places too much importance on his masculinity. Unlike Henri from *The Passion*, Jove does not possess feminine traits and is unwilling to change and to accept a different and fluid understanding of the world. While Henri is initially befuddled by the illogical Venice, he grows to understand it and adopts a feminine standpoint regarding space. With Jove, Winterson is less liberal: she clearly makes him a foil to the women and turns him into a paradigm of negativity, since he is a cheater, a flesh-eater and ultimately a self-absorbed and commanding man. To him the loss of clear distinctions between inside and outside is traumatic and irreparable: the incident of the drifting boat disorders his firm beliefs in the stability of matter, so he goes mad and starts eating his wife. His cannibalistic urges start with a hunger for his wife's guts; all his senses work together to induce an inexplicably strong appetite for liver, to the point that all he can see or smell is this organ: "We were eating liver. Liver. I couldn't get my mind off the liver. When Stella and I finished the last of the cheese biscuits I was salivating liver […] When I looked at Stella what I saw was her liver" (GS 194).

Cannibalism is used here both in the literal and the metaphorical sense; Jove consumes parts of Stella's body, and by doing so he is also asserting his power over her body, an internalization of his anxiety of propriety loss (the male propriety over the female body through marriage). Cannibalism suggests "an extreme desire to devour a person, to incorporate someone into oneself, a lust for total possession or a rage for obliteration and supremacy. The suggestion of rapacious dealings and profound yearning for union together indicate the conflicting motivations of power and love" (Sceats 34). Jove's desire for ingesting his wife is linked to a form of regression to a place of origin, the womb of the mother:

> I fell into a kind of dream, almost a trance, a hunger trance I suppose and I was a child again and my mother was feeding me[…] I made the cut so carefully. I made it like a surgeon not a butcher[…] I did it so that it would not have disgusted either of us. She was my wife. I was her husband. We were one flesh. With my body I thee worship. In sickness and in health. For better or for worse. Till death us do part. Till death us do part. I parted the flesh from the bone and I ate it (GS 195-196).

The passage prompts psychoanalytic insights: Jove's hunger trance is an immersion into the maternal abject. Melanie Klein, in *Envy and Gratitude,* speaks of a "cannibalistic impulse" which is linked to the child's "oral-sadistic impulses towards the mother's breast" (Klein 5). Quoting some of Abraham's ideas, she claims that cannibalistic desires induce a sense of guilt, and in its turn, "guilt gives rise to the urge to make reparation to the harmed object, to preserve or revive it" (Klein 44) When weaning occurs, the infant feels he has lost his first love object, the mother's breast, because of hatred, aggression and greed. The subsequent states of depression and mourning help the child to gain insight into psychic reality, and therefore this engenders a better understanding of the external world (Klein 44). Hence, Jove's regression to a primordial unity with his mother unleashes his oral-aggressive impulses, and he makes his wife's body an avatar of his mother: therefore the repressed physical aggression that was due after the loss of the mother's breast is now released onto Stella's body. Russell West contends that the breast of the mother evokes the genesis of the subject and implicitly the danger of death, which is the central aspect of abjection (West in Kutzback and Mueller Eds. 236). "Cannibalism, the eating of "another self" (humans eating humans) can thus be understood within European representations of anthropophagy as an avatar of the ingestion of that primordial Other from whom the subject

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emerges – and who evermore represents the threat of regression to an undifferentiated fusional existence" (West in Kutzback and Mueller eds. 236). The cannibalistic act of Jove joins together two rites of passage: the sacred vows of matrimony are interpreted literally, so that "till death do us part" turns into a parting of flesh.

Splitting and fragmentariness are imperfect states of being throughout *Gut Symmetries.*As Alice ruefully laments, "We cannot talk about atoms anymore because atom means indivisible. We have split it" (GS 206).Like the characters of *The Passion*, she and Stella (the man is left out of this idealistic strive) 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 136). This search for the "whole truth" is made visible in *Gut Symmetries* not only through the discourses of science and Kaballah but also through literary intertextuality; the initial references to *Moby Dick*, which grow stronger towards the end as Alice sails together with Captain Ahab and Ishmael, accentuate the similarity between the two fictional works. Captain Ahab's search for Moby Dick is replete with symbolism, the whiteness of the animal suggesting either an absence or a primordial completeness which cannot be grasped by humans. The fact that Alice's world mingles with the world of *Moby Dick* illustrates once more the illusion of borders: there is no way of telling where one book ends and another starts, as there is no way of distinguishing between lovers' bodies.

Despite the negative connotations of love as a principle which threatens the limits of selfhood, the overarching conclusion of the book is that love also remains the unifying force of the universe. Alice, who privileges the fluid over the stable and who takes quantum theory literally, asserts her belief in the enduring power of love: "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends" (GS164). The quote echoes a passage from the Bible, Corinthians 13:7 and places the novel deeper into the net of spiritual symbolism. Alice concludes the book with the idea that love is cosmic and the cosmos is mirrored in the body: "The universe hangs here, in this narrow strait, infinity and compression caught in the hour. Space and time cannot be separated. History and futurity are now. The universe curving in your gut" (GS 219). The dissolution of borders, the strive for the hermaphrodite, the collision of worlds and philosophies, the intertextuality and the continuity of time and space

In this paper, I have approached the body as a spatial metaphor and I discussed *Gut Symmetries* in light of its engagement with the concept of border. *Gut Symmetries* insists on the analogies between the body and the universe; science causes the gender shift between masculinity and femininity: whereas Stella and Alice believe that matter is provisional and apply the principles of quantum theory literally, Jove thinks that matter is stable and cannot shift dramatically. Jove is a paragon of maleness, which is why he is represented in negative terms as self-absorbed overpowering cheater who eventually resorts to cannibalism.

The amalgam of ancient philosophy, superstring theory, quantum physics, Kaballah and Tarot puts into perspective the hollowness of categorizations and limits. The sky is the limit, Winterson seems to suggest through her analogies between the guts and the stars. The public and the personal are fused to the point of suture: just like Grand Unified Theory seeks to unite the three major forces of the universe (weak, strong and electromagnetic force), the three lovers, Jove, Stella and Alice form an "Eternal Triangle". The cosmos is contained in Stella's body: she has a diamond in her spine. The model of the "one" is sought through different strategies of

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meaning in the novel: intertextuality (the erasure of fictional boundaries), the leveling of "real science" and pseudo-science, the insistence on the fluidity of the time-space continuum, the questioning of identity, cannibalism as the urge to ingest the primordial "Other" and most importantly, love. I have insisted on Jove's act of eating a part of his wife's flesh by looking at Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection and Lacan's notion of the Real. His desire to ingest the flesh of his wife is crucial to the interpretation of the novel, as it points back to a state of wholeness which has been disordered. And it is this craved-for wholeness that intercepts the connection between body and the galaxy. *Gut Symmetries* deplores the fragmentariness of humanity, yet asserts the hope for a cosmic identity, which can only be achieved through the most elusive and fascinating concept of civilization: love.

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